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THE YOUNGEST DRAMA



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THE YOUNGEST DRAMA

STUDIES OF FIFTY DRAMATISTS
BY ASHLEY DUKES



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TO

THE YOUNGEST DRAMATISTS

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MIRRORS AND MASKS

MIRRORS AND MASKS

DRAMA may be either a mirror or an expression of the times. In Congreve, Wycherley and Sheridan it was a mirror ; in the great Elizabethans an expression. It was a mirror in the younger Dumas, but an expression in Ibsen and Strindberg. It was a mirror in the leisurely comedy of Henry Arthur Jones or Hubert Henry Davies, but an expression in the shimmering wit of Oscar Wilde or the shattering penetration of Bernard Shaw. It is a mirror in the amiable comedy of A. A. Milne, the satirical comedy of Somerset Maugham, the faithful realism of St. John Ervine, the critical realism of C. K. Munro ; but an expression in the plays of Claudel, Andreev, Toller or Pirandello. The culture of a weary and sceptical age was mirrored in the plays of the Parisian boulevards ; the restless spirit of a culture shaken to its foundations is expressed in the drama of Prague. Our realists endeavour to set pygmies faithfully upon the stage ; and our poets grope in the urn of history for ashes of greatness into which may be breathed the spirit of to-day. High comedy, that classic mirror of the leisured graces, is gravelled for lack of manners on which to exercise its spirit ;

and tragedy, that classic expression of a mind ennobled, stirs dumbly among a people that has suffered mutilation and abasement. The degradation of a culture, whether in comfortable Western Europe or seething Middle Europe or chaotic Russia, touches the dramatist closely. Not a bomb is manufactured, not a military personage clanks his spurs across a street, not a Napoleon of the hired Press issues orders to his obsequious staff, but the wells of human pity are poisoned and the winds of human fantasy corrupted. The re-birth of a culture likewise touches the dramatist. Not a voice is raised for the things of the imagination but an audience gathers eagerly to listen.

As with the dramatist's art, so it is with the art of interpretation. The stage should be either a mirror or an expression of the drama ; but it may be no more than a lingering survival, a faint reflection of a reflection. In the traditional homes of European comedy, like the Burg Theater of Vienna, threadbare actors still grope in the wardrobe of the past for the gestures and intonations of an artificial society. They are empty gestures and hollow tones, for that society exists no longer. In London and Paris, to a lesser degree, the conventions of an outworn epoch hold the stage. The fashions of dress are always new, but the fashions of acting, with their genteel and uninspired realism, belong to last season or last decade. In Moscow the plays of Chekhov are presented to a bewildered proletariat that has never known the tedium of culture.

Producers like Tairoff, who are aware of the bankruptcy of verisimilitude in acting, seek to make the temperament of the player the source and fountain of dramatic art. In New York a cosmopolitan and curious throng runs to gape at every novelty, whether it be English realism, German expressionism or Russian art of the cabaret. But for the most part the stage is neither a mirror nor an expression of the drama ; it is sunk in the torpor of yesterday's gentility, like a half-pay colonel in a Bloomsbury lodging. The dramas of our distracted world are played elsewhere—in Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay, in banks and offices, in hotels and *trains de luxe*—and the drama represented on the actual stage bears no comparison with their crude vigour. The theatre of the hundred thousand has no more to say to us, and the theatre of the million does not yet exist. The old audience is enfeebled or exhausted ; the new audience of the people's theatre is still a dream of the future. Yet this stage and this audience are the partners with whom the dramatist must collaborate. Let it be said here, for it will not be said again in these pages. The art of the theatre is an art of threefold collaboration, and therefore is vitally concerned in the well-being of all its partners. The widest audience that a play can reach, without distinction of class or custom, must be brought into the theatre. The actor or producer must rid the stage of the dead conventions that encumber it—the lifeless gestures of lifelike banality, the muffled voices of indisputable good

taste, the vulgarity of the trouser-press and the cigarette and all the rest of the painted toys of verisimilitude—and leave space for mimic art to walk in dignity. Only then can we speak of a stage that mirrors nature, and sets the mask of expression on the face of life.

And the dramatist? This is a book of dramatists, who shall be given leave to speak for themselves. They are of all persuasions, from the younger realists and writers of comedy to the expressionists, the historians, and those Dionysian poets who now break in upon the Socratic calm of the theatre. There are some who wield the mirror and some who wear the mask, but none (I hope) who are unworthy to stand as representative of the theatre of our youngest generation, that of the Great War and afterwards. That there are others with a claim to admission I am too well aware; but let these serve for a beginning. Concerning the dramatists who are called Forerunners, there may be even more difference of opinion. Some of them are dramatists of the last generation, others are still at the height of their powers. It is with no thought of laying them on a grave and reverend shelf that they are thus summarily grouped. But there is no space within the scope of this book for any other recognition of their significance. For honour's sake our debt to them must be paid, though it be in a coin scarcely more than epigrammatic. To them the creative impulse of the youngest drama is due.

FORERUNNERS

FORERUNNERS

Gabriele D'Annunzio

D'ANNUNZIO is an aristocrat among artists. It is not for him to join in a revolt against the drab commonplace of the realistic theatre ; it is not for him to deride, like Anton Chekhov, the " morality fit for household use " with which the *bourgeois* dramatist purges the shabby soul of his listener. For him the theatre of the day has no real existence. Like the poor who are never seen, its playwrights and actors offend none of his susceptibilities. He is above the battle. D'Annunzio paints for us the landscape of a world where " a tempest of flaming dust " eddies round dead cities ; where a desert is " a lake of flame " ; where mountains are " tawny and savage, like lionesses " ; where a woman speaks at nightfall, and " the quiver of a thousand wings " is in her voice. He represents for us the drama of a world where saintly devotion and sensual charm, in female shape, battle for the possession of a man's soul ; where symbols of physical deformity, like Anna's blindness and Silvia's mutilated hands, contrast with the plastic beauty of a statue or a phrase ; where the threads of exaltation are no longer

episodic touches of colour in the grey background of existence, but are woven to compose the entire chromatic texture of triumphant life. He seeks for primary emotional motives ; all his sacrifices are martyrdoms, all his passions are ecstasies. In the perspective of his dramas rise the pillars of classical form, and in the foreground move figures who recall the art of the Italian masters. And yet a shimmer of banality overspreads the whole. The tragic sense merges into the sensational. The symbolic conception is blurred by the sentimental. The fantasy withers in the torrid heats of emphasis. This airman indeed never falls to earth, but he soars into the empyrean with all the facility of journalism.

Sir James Barrie

Since Sir James Barrie is now an established dogma, there is some hope of an ultimate revolt against him. It may be that the vociferous generation yearly shepherded to the portals of *Peter Pan* will grow up with an abhorrence of impish sentiment, an aversion from pawky humour and a positive loathing for whimsicality. That is what happens to established principles in which mistaken parents endeavour to instruct the young. It may even be that the rebellious generation is already with us. One heard last year of twins aged seven who hated *Peter Pan*, and of their proud mother who showed them all over Kensington as young prodigies. They were doubtless forward children.

The genius of Barrie makes the dogma all the more insupportable. For it is indubitably genius, if words have any meaning. The most churlish of playgoers will grant that this man has more than talent. His first editions are ignored in the market-place, his rectorial addresses are much sought after—but the spark is in him. There is genius that attracts and genius that repels. When Barrie touches us it is always on the softer side, with his old maids in *Quality Street* and his dream-child in *Dear Brutus*. He often flicks his listener on the raw. His pathos leans out over the brink of the impermissible. There is an extremity, a *jusqu'auboutisme* in his treatment of emotion that resembles the handling of the sexual motive by some Frenchman or the handling of wit by Mr. Shaw. We tremble to know where the thing will stop, and whether the final tug at the heart-strings will be made by a humane hand or by that of some indelicate hobgoblin. When he makes us laugh it is often a little awry. When he makes us think (which is seldom) we are reminded of an urchin clambering up the rear of the motor-lorry of modernity, crying “Whip behind!” to the driver and grimacing at the passers-by.

And yet he transfigures his characters. Who shall deny their radiance? None but the irreconcilables to whom fantasy seems a Heaven-sent gift so golden and wonderful in this leaden world that it should only be bestowed upon poets. But fantasy, as well as yellow soap, transfigures the shining housemaid

in the eyes of the corporal who meets her at Hyde Park Corner. Barrie enables us to see her through the corporal's eyes—and he remains a prosaic author.

Henry Becque

A street in Paris is named after Henry Becque, who died in 1899. His statue stands in some sequestered corner ; his plays are still performed by the Comédie Française. His memory, from time to time, is taken down and dusted by a critic. As modern writing goes, these are no small steps towards immortality. Becque was a fine if not a great dramatist. He was interested first of all in people and afterwards in the symmetrical grouping of people. *La Parisienne* is a fine comedy because it is a symmetrical comedy. The author's touch is firm ; his characters are never out of hand. No superfluous word is spoken ; all the witticisms are *mots de situation* rather than *mots d'auteur*. On the other hand (and this is the important point) every necessary word is spoken—the subject is fully explored. Although no “thinker” Becque was logical, and his logic was rich in humour. Consider, for example, the scene in which Clotilde, the Parisienne, marshals her grievances against her lover. There is plenty of matter for reproach. He is jealous ; he is indiscreet and therefore dangerous ; he irritates her by claiming too much of her life. Two charges remain. One is that he does not like her husband, a circumstance which touches her vanity and outrages her sense of fitness ;

the other, that he is a man of loose opinions. She cries : “ Vous êtes un libre penseur ! Je crois que vous vous entendriez très bien avec une maîtresse qui n’aurait pas de religion, quelle horreur ! ” At this passage every audience laughs, applauding a supposed paradox ; but there is no paradox. The woman is like that. The scene is as fresh to-day as it was in 1885 because truth is savoured by a grain of exaggeration, and not exaggeration savoured by a grain of truth. Equally fresh is the famous line at the opening of the play, “ Prenez garde ; voilà mon mari ! ” coming at the moment when you have made up your mind that the quarrelsome pair are husband and wife. Such flashes prove that Becque was a good dramatist. He understood how to bring off a *coup de théâtre* with the greatest effect, and yet there was nothing meretricious in his work. It was in the motive behind the *coup*—the revelation of character—that he showed genius.

It is strange to think that this play was first performed six years after Ibsen’s *Doll’s House*, and two years before the foundation of Antoine’s Théâtre Libre. The French have never taken kindly to Ibsen. One reason, perhaps, is that they have always possessed a conception of social equality between the sexes ; so that Ibsen’s women brought them nothing new, but only a restatement of an old idea in foreign terms. With Becque the conception of social equality was instinctive. All his women are a match for their men ; Clotilde in *La Parisienne*, the group in *Les Corbeaux*, the

heroines of *La Navette* and *L'Enlèvement*. They are not independent in the English way, or in the Norwegian way, but in a way of their own. It does not occur to them to talk of freedom, because they are unconscious of being oppressed. And they have saving graces. If they are moral, it is not from inclination ; if they are immoral, it is not on principle.

Nor could the French appreciate Ibsen's genius, apart from the message he had to deliver. They have never understood foreign poets. Bécque was a native dramatist with something of the spirit of Molière. He returned to an old and fine tradition of the stage at a period when most of his contemporaries were seeking to establish a new tradition. He had nothing to say about social movements or currents of thought (being possibly even sceptical of their value), but he had a good deal to say about husbands, wives, lovers and other simple phenomena of human nature, and said it with distinction. Now that a generation has passed, we can see that he was a great artist. His eternal triangle, being equilateral, pleases the eye. His irony, born of deep feeling, touches a true sense of comedy. His writing, terse and audacious, restores a standard of dramatic dialogue. His masterly technique forms a link between the old theatre and the new.

Jacinto Benavente

Benavente's *The Bonds of Interest* (*Los Intereses Creados*) is a Molièresque comedy of no particular

period, containing a moral for our own. A penniless adventurer falls in with an impudent servant who undertakes by his wits alone to impose his master upon elegant society. Credulity shall be his instrument and interest his weapon. His gulls may find him out, but they will never venture to admit it. His master shall be received as a nobleman ; he shall have credit at his inn ; he shall win the heart of an heiress ; and when the reckoning comes he shall be sufficiently established in the world of fashion to blackmail his dupes into leaving him there. The comedy develops according to plan, with a brisk chorus of worldly wisdom from the swaggering servant (a part for a great actor) and an accompaniment of graceful sentiment in the scenes of courtship. The bonds of interest uniting the dupes are skilfully revealed ; indeed Molière has no more delightful scenes of family discomfiture and legal confusion. At the end the characters make their bow stiffly and tell us that they are only puppets ; but this we knew already. The play appears to rank far above Benavente's comedies of present-day Spanish life—just as the theme, at once charming and thoughtful, rises above the imbroglios of our comedy of sex.

Arnold Bennett

In *The Great Adventure* Mr. Bennett surely gave his best. His men and women of the Five Towns have an awkward gait when they are set upon the stage, and it seems that the author's dramatic tech-

nique is unequal to the detail of his portraiture. His fashionable folk also have the air of country cousins, and nobody believes in the smartness of those amusing comedies *The Title* and *The Honeymoon*. His financial magnates and dwellers in Grand Babylon hotels are frankly tedious, and we suspect that the gilded palaces they inhabit are in reality the excellent establishments controlled by Sir Joseph Lyons. In *Milestones*, written in collaboration with Mr. Knoblauch, the interest depends less on character than on wholesome sentiment, good-humour and shrewdness. But Ilam Carve of *The Great Adventure* is a man we should all be proud to meet—not because he was a great artist who got himself vicariously buried in Westminster Abbey, but because distinction is written all over his figure. Ilam Carve is somebody ; we believe in his talent if not in his genius. The play grows naturally out of his shyness, and we accept all its branching improbabilities as reflections on that single trait. Also, the subject suits the manner of Mr. Bennett, which is half-realistic and half-fantastic, with a pinch of satire thrown in. He is no Balzac, but a cosmopolitan journalist, a Midlander in France, a European in London, a “business man of letters.” He likes to stagger the *bourgeois* and tease the mandarins. Is not Westminster Abbey almost sacrosanct ? He likes to talk of art with understanding. He likes to study odd relationships like the marriage of an artist with a housekeeper. He frankly enjoys the sensational repercussions of his plot ; he loves a

reporter and an art expert. In all these things he finds the zest of life.

The Old Wives' Tale and *Clayhanger* may have a more permanent quality than his comedies, but we remember gratefully that once at least he played the mandarins off the stage.

Eugène Brieux

The dramatic works of M. Brieux came to us at a time when censored plays were commonly confused with masterpieces. No less than three of his dramas were refused a licence by the Lord Chamberlain, and it was difficult to escape the conclusion that he must be a dramatist of extraordinary eminence. Moreover, Mr. Shaw stood sponsor for him and declared with some rashness that this author was the most important event in European drama since Ibsen. Several of his plays were translated into English, and they proved to be not very remarkable works of the French realistic school (the school of the Théâtre Libre) with a padding of not very remarkable philosophy. The greater the realism and the less the padding, as in *The Hennetons* or *The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont*, the better was the play. M. Brieux was thoroughly tedious only in such works as *Motherhood*, dedicated to the Society for the Prevention of Depopulation in France, or *The Philanthropists*, where his leanings towards moral platitudes made themselves felt. It was the war, however, that found him out. His *Damaged Goods* (*Les Avariés*), which had been

ostensibly forbidden the theatre as a work of art, was welcomed as an instrument of social hygiene and performed for all men to see. It did, let us hope, more service to the public health than to M. Brieux's reputation. He should certainly have received an O.B.E.

Alfred Capus

The sceptical spirit is the mainstay of the moderately gifted Frenchman. It gives a touch of distinction to ordinary work. It lends a cloak of style to the sentimental motive. It covers a retreat from realities. True, it grows tiresome in the end—as tiresome as the pornography of the French comic paper. The blood of the eighteenth century no longer runs in the veins of scepticism; we are rather reminded of a gouty old cavalier hobbling after a pretty ankle. He has no illusions about its possessor and few about the pleasure of the chase, and yet he hobbles because the thing is a habit with him. If we accept this scepticism of the *vieux marcheur* for what it is worth, we must grant that the late M. Capus made engaging use of it. His comedies were thoroughly mediocre and thoroughly amusing, thanks to the never-failing impudence of their cynicism. One remembers admirable characters in them, such as the good-natured man who complains pathetically, “Chaque fois qu'une femme de notre entourage a envie de tromper son mari, mon affaire est bonne; c'est sur moi que ça tombe!” One remembers the devoted

lover who helps his divinity into and out of half a dozen successive marriages, always vainly hoping that the next turn for bridegroom will be his own, and always prudently encouraging the advances of a husband whose tenure is likely to be brief. These are types without charm but not without style. In them the sceptical spirit reached its logical and trivial old age.

Anton Chekhov

Anton Chekhov is a profound realist. No other writer could give us a play in which revolver shots are fired without result. When the echoes have died away and the intended victims are seen to stand trembling but unhurt, the spectator feels that he will never again care for the tawdry realism of plays where three shots are fired and three bodies lie stretched upon the carpet. As Judge Brack said, such things don't happen. Chekhov knows something of the nature of revolvers, and he knows more of the singular inconsequence of life.

The missed aim is a dramatic symbol. All the people whom we like best in *Uncle Vanya* have missed it. The aim may be love, or a career, or simply life in its fullness ; the shot has been fired and nothing has happened. On the other hand, the people whom we most dislike are always successful in Chekhov. They make the bull's-eye every time. Look, for instance, at the professor who has written books for twenty-five years about Art, and knows nothing of the subject.

Yet Chekhov knows as well as any dramatist that the unexpected event is of no significance in the theatre. An unexpected death has no more effect than the overturning of a piece of furniture ; an unexpected twist of character is the ruin of fourth acts. The soul of surprise is preparation. When his plays were first performed the nature of the preparation was obscure and the effect of the surprise was baffling. There is a technique of the listener as well as a technique of the playwright. Our minds were accustomed to the drama of direct narrative, or the drama of social indignation, against which Constantine in *The Seagull* rebelled. They were not attuned to the new conception of this last and greatest of the naturalists. But now that we have lived for a generation with his characters, they are better understood.

The depth of their reserve is the measure of our comprehension. Their silences are memorable, their small talk is momentous. Some of them reveal themselves by indirect narrative—by describing their love of fishing, or their inability to read anything but a newspaper, or their aversion from women in the days when they were students at the university. A man of middle age plays at imaginary billiards in the drawing-room and punctuates his conversation with “ In off the red ! ” Another speaks of his beautiful and unattainable ideals, the chief of which proves to be the ideal of going to bed sober.

Behind these talkative personages, tragic and

often taciturn, stand the primary characters of Chekhov. It may take us two entire acts to discover that the plain daughter of the household is hopelessly in love with the least heroic of heroes, and then the radiance of her nature suddenly illuminates the play. Symbolism lies implicit in such a moment of beauty. The link is forged, the key to character is discovered ; and we perceive in a flash that the drama is concerned not with outward happenings but with inward life.

The theatre of Chekhov is called “typically Russian,” as though *Hamlet* were typically English. The art of expression lies deeper than such idioms. This drama is universal. These complex and enigmatic characters are ourselves.

John Galsworthy

The outward verisimilitude of Mr. Galsworthy's plays sometimes masks, and sometimes exposes, their inward falsity. There is no dramatist who can give a more faithful impression of a magistrate's court, a lawyer's office or a profiteer's drawing-room ; and no dramatist who can people the scene with more flagrant prevaricators, animated though they be by the best intentions. Where the realistic veil effectively conceals the moral perversion of reality, as in *Loyalties* or *The Silver Box*, we call the play good Galsworthy or even good drama ; and where this cloak of decency is plucked away, as in *The Mob* or *The Fugitive*, we blush for the author as much as for ourselves.

In *Justice*, that important indictment of our prison system, the veil of realism half covers the tragedy. William Falder himself suffers and goes to his death with dumb impressiveness ; but the other characters address us in the manner of counsel appealing to a jury with their string of pompous little metaphors and sententious quotations. The junior partner of a firm of solicitors wishes to show compassion to an embezzling clerk. He might tell his father so in simple, manly language ; but instead he drops his voice to a half whisper with the words : "The quality of mercy is not strained." This is pure Galsworthiness ; it bears no relation to the facts of life or the nature of young solicitors. A phrase about "the chariot wheels of justice" runs in the young man's head. Again, William Falder's sweetheart is interrogated about her life since he went to prison. She drifted into poverty. "And what happened then ?" asks the old solicitor's clerk. She braces herself for her great Galsworthian effort. "My employer happened then," she says. "He has happened ever since." No, this is not realism. Life may be unexpected, but it is not so unconvincing. Or again, the old solicitor's clerk sits in the prison governor's office, looking as though he would like to thump the table. "I keep dogs," he says, with as much passion as the line will carry. He means that he is a humane man and would not lock them up in separate kennels for weeks together. The sentiment is praiseworthy, but we feel it is Mr.

Galsworthy and not the old solicitor's clerk who introduces the subject of human beings with the words "I keep dogs."

Yet the dramatist's one overmastering emotion, that of pity, counts for much. It rises with a certain dignity above the plane of banal expression. It animates the drama as sincere emotion must. We listen perhaps without belief, but we listen. After all, it is better to regard men and women as suffering animals than to regard them as amorous animals or replete after-dinner animals or performing animals. It is better to be sincerely mistaken in emotions than to feel no emotions at all. And although Mr. Galsworthy is not at heart a realist he has borrowed enough from the realistic method to give weight to his humane reflections. He has borrowed enough from the spirit of the times to make him a dignified arbitrator between capital and labour, vulgarity and good breeding, the individual and the mass. But for the discipline imposed by these borrowings he would be a blameless author of humane novelettes, instead of a dramatist who reminds us with patient regularity that there are two sides to every question.

Maxim Gorky

Gorky's submerged townsmen in *A Night Shelter* (alias *The Lower Depths*) belong to a type of proletarian drama that is definitely "dated." There are still submerged townsmen, though in Russia they may be noblemen instead of cabdrivers.

Lower depths of poverty are still to be found, and Europe abounds in doss-houses crammed with such rancid heaps of huddled men and women. What is changed is the spirit of the observation. A playgoer in Russia has recorded his feelings on seeing Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* acted in Moscow before an audience of workmen. The hopeless mood of the characters made the strongest impression. It had been realised that the *bourgeois* had once been well housed and well fed, well dressed and well mated ; but it had never been understood that they had been so thoroughly miserable. The physical fullness of their bellies was remembered, but the emptiness of their spirit had been forgotten. So we must now look back upon the proletarian drama of Gorky (period 1900-1910). His poor are terrible indeed. They are roofless vagabonds ; they live like the beasts of the field ; but above all they are poor in spirit. The white-bearded Luka, named by the others "the little father," preaches his gospel of cheerfulness in the midst of misery ; and Satin, at once tougher and more prophetic, looks forward vaguely to the growth of some future lord of creation from the soil of squalor. The times have passed them by. The proletarian dramatist of to-day will not offer us such a naked representation of fact, seasoned though it be with a character and philosophy "typically Russian" or typically of any country. The strong arm of action will mould his work.

Harley Granville-Barker

If there be such a thing as the beauty of rationalism, it is to be found in Mr. Granville-Barker's thoughtful series of plays beginning with *The Marrying of Ann Leete* and ending (for the present) with *The Secret Life*. It is an Apollonian sort of beauty, far removed from the ecstatic or Dionysian frenzy that your rationalist profoundly mistrusts. It is the beauty of calm that protests gently but firmly against a disordered world. The superficial observer may call it the beauty of the blue book, content to oppose incontrovertible fact to fantastic error; but it is something more than that. The blue book, although admirable, is insensitive. It is the living voice of the cultivated English middle-class, the class unknown to the Pineros of our stage, that speaks in *The Madras House* and *The Voysey Inheritance*. Unhappily for drama, this voice lacks the carrying power dear to the theatre. It does not play to the gallery, or even to the circle, as actors say. It is content if the thought reach the mind of a single listener in the recesses of the stalls or the pit. Subtleties abound in this drama of the intelligence. The slang of subtlety abounds also, and it is not the slang of literature, but the quiet, orderly expression of the orderly mind, deeply conscientious and not without wit and humour. Thus we make acquaintance with heroes who disclaim from the beginning, in their quiet cultivated way, all pretensions to

heroism, and are content to seek an "attitude towards money" or an "attitude towards women." When a statesman's passing intimacy with a woman wrecks his career, compromises his schemes of political reform, and ends his life, the cry from the stage is not "The pity of it!" but "The waste of it!" The cry is not heartrending, but it is sincerer than many heartrending cries of the theatre. It touches the cold reality with which the thoughtful spectator is concerned. The vision of a bathroom tap left running rises before the callous mind, but Mr. Barker does not write for callous people. The spectator who looks for deep imagination is untouched, but Mr. Barker does not write for poets. He writes for his peers in the house of cultivation, which is the true fourth estate in our national life, and by them he is understood with a mental effort that is always considerable but never goes unrewarded.

Gerhart Hauptmann

The history of Gerhart Hauptmann as dramatist is the history of our own times. He is not, like Ibsen or Strindberg, a voice proclaiming the spirit of his age in resonant and inevitable words. He is rather a gentle and faithful echo, not only of the tumult of the many and the murmurs of the few, the din of the factory or the quiet of the farmhouse parlour, but also of those other voices stronger than his own, and of those other spirits profounder though less sensitive. He was an innkeeper's son,

and his drama is rooted in a comprehension of simple men who sit in taverns. His first play, *Before Sunrise*, was a tribute laid upon the hearth-stone of this common people as well as a beginning of naturalism in the German theatre. When he wrote of more sophisticated men and women, as in *Colleague Crampton* or *The Thieves' Comedy*, the elemental nature of the peasant remained the groundwork of his portraiture. It was but a step from the tavern and the farm to the social drama of *The Weavers*. When he wrote dream-poems and romances such as *Hannele* or *The Sunken Bell* it was the mythology of the peasant that infused them through and through, and his hero in the historical *Florian Geyer* is a leader of the peasants' war. Classical legend became peasant-drama under his hand, as *Griselda* witnesses, and through the notable series of the naturalistic dramas stride grave figures such as Henschel the waggoner, with every road barred to him except the road to death, and Rose Bernd, the farm-wench, defending her unborn child against the sneers of the parish.

Hauptmann has been faithful to his own people ; to their aspirations as well as their speech, to their soul as well as their countryside. He is the representative German of his day because he is the representative provincial—a Silesian innkeeper's son standing hand in hand, as at the Breslau festival in honour of Hauptmann's sixtieth birthday, with a saddler President—but also because he is a voice of the masses and an interpreter of tragic events in

times that have themselves grown tragic. If history does not regard him as a great proletarian dramatist it will be because, for good or ill, he has always been the representative German of his day. He has been readier to follow than to lead, readier to echo than to cry in wildernesses. It was the Silesian workers who gave the impulse to *The Weavers*, and Hauptmann who added the line or two of human, all-too-human, philosophy that scarcely outlives its generation. The logic of naturalism was too much even for a dramatist of his observant genius ; and so the logic was softened in the Silesian dramas by little touches of human, all-too-human, sentiment, and in the dream-plays by borrowings from Grimm. The war and war's aftermath have raised *Florian Geyer* shoulder-high above his other plays, for Florian Geyer is a symbol of Germany, a symbol of defeat and hope. These are all reflexes, however ; they are fragmentary scenes from the historical drama of *Gerhart Hauptmann*, which may one day be written. The dramatic impulse came from without, not from within. But we recognise that in this dramatist the art of naturalism, which is the capture of beauty in detail, came to its finest flower. It has for the present no more to give us, but it gave much and gave generously.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Hofmannsthal shares with Maeterlinck the honour of having challenged for the first time the realistic

conventions of the later nineteenth-century theatre. His "little dramas," including *Yesterday*, *The Death of Titian*, and *Death and the Fool*, date from 1891-94, the very period when *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *La Mort de Tintagiles* were taking shape. Their inspiration was drawn from the Italian Renaissance, as Maeterlinck's was drawn from the vast and fear-haunted forest of chivalric romance. But the challenge was delivered in so gentle a fashion, and with so graceful and amiable a gesture, that its importance was at first scarcely understood. Hofmannsthal was thought to be a writer born out of his time and perhaps out of his country, a Florentine, a Greekling; just as Maeterlinck was dubbed "the Belgian Shakespeare" at his first whisper of symbolism. It is true that his plays are highly derivative. Hofmannsthal has never wholly escaped from a subjection to his models, whether in the dramatic reflection of the Renaissance, in the reconstruction of Greek tragedy, or in the remoulding of the mediæval morality. As librettist to Richard Strauss he has even imposed on himself a new subjection to the conventions of the theatre that has cramped and stultified his art. His sensitive spirit carries weaknesses with it. The lyrical gift is uppermost in the earlier plays. In the *Elektra* he seeks an expression that is almost brutal; he strives to set in being these adulterous kings, these incestuous queens, these seers and oracles and bloody myths; and their movement is galvanic, but there is no life in them. They are

sleep-walkers ; a black mist overspreads them. They scream of passion ; they dance "nameless dances" ; and they leave us shattered and unconvinced. In *Everyman* Hofmannsthal gives all the didactic spirit of the morality and fails to recreate the gross simplicity of his mediæval mortals. In *Christina's Homecoming* he gives all the intrigue of artificial comedy and none of the comedy of character. In *The Great World Theatre* he rises once again to lyrical heights, but we feel that the drama he envisages is not the drama of his own achievement ; he is a herald of the work of others. In looking into the past he has looked forward. He is indeed a forerunner, though no pioneer.

Henrik Ibsen

The Wild Duck is surely the masterpiece of modern construction. No play links so many characters in such beauty of design. Consider that the greater number of our modern plays concern two, three, at most four persons, loosely related ; the minor figures tossed in almost at random for effects of relief or contrast. Think of the *raisonneurs*, the bland uncles, the *confidantes*, the heavy fathers, the tedious love-making children cumbering the stage with their presence. The futility, the purposeless waste of them all ! Or think of the modern drama of a tendency where people exist for theses and "views," and each personage, wrapt in his particular garment, is indifferent to the fate of the rest. And then consider that in

this *Wild Duck* we see a whole group of characters, a round dozen at the least, each of whom is indispensable to the drama. We cannot think of them as major or minor, vital or needless to the action. They are the action. Try to eliminate such figures as old Ekdal or old Werle or Mrs. Sorby, who appear so rarely, and you no longer have *The Wild Duck*. They care nothing for ideas in general, except in so far as they care for each other. Gregers Werle goes blundering along, holding high his banner of the ideal ; but it is Hialmar's case which has stirred him into life and thought. Relling laughs at him contemptuously, but he has the hardness of a sensitive man withdrawn into a shell. Mark his tenderness towards Hedvig, and the wonderful hard simplicity of his words at the close : "Can't you see that Hedvig is dead ?" Relling is humane ; he is a man for an emergency, a man to be relied upon. But then he has suffered ; he has learned much from Mrs. Sörby and other women. His relation to her is touched upon in two sentences only ; we know all, but we would ask for more. And Ibsen will not give more. Where other dramatists would write whole scenes, he makes ten words suffice. They tell us much of Ibsen and his great, spare design. Other instances are the relation of Mrs. Sörby to Werle or of Werle to Gina Ekdal. The old thin-lipped rascal Werle stands in his labyrinth, his web ; this way and that run the fates of womenfolk ; we glance at each in a flash. Hialmar Ekdal, the poor sanguine fool, follows one

of them, fathering a doubtful child ; and Werle's own son shows him that he is tangled and lost. A superb piece of irony, and a masterly tragic motive, for even Werle cares ; the child moves him.

There is no end to wanderings in this world of characters. But the purpose is served if we understand but the hundredth part of Ibsen's use of the dramatic form and the intention which lay behind it. The routine work, the outward form, a hundred Frenchmen had perfected before his time ; but they played with their puppets, he lived with them. The poet sees an inner world. Could any other playright have devised that shy and beautiful exchange of feeling—one can hardly call it a dialogue—between Gregers and Hedvig ? Such things as these cannot be analysed ; they must be comprehended. They pass in a temple remote from the profane.

Henry Arthur Jones

Mr. Henry Arthur Jones was born to be that most estimable but least popular of writers, a satirist. With an unusual blend of energy and cynicism he diverted his talents to the field of high comedy. He amused the fashionable public of a period when the bustle was just going out and the motor-car just coming in. He wrote a series of ingenious pieces concerning ladies who had been indiscreet and nothing more ; and they were vastly and deservedly successful. Presently the bustle went out and the motor-car came in ; and Mr.

Jones's days as a writer of comedies were numbered. He reverted honourably to his original trade of satire. He wrote *Mary Goes First*, taking as his text the quotation from Fettleworth : " Thus it appears that the Honours and Dignities adjudged by the State serve often but to varnish the Stratagems and Pretences whereby they have been obtained ; and the claim to Precedency is shown to be the claim of those who have no other claim to our Admiration and Esteem." His comedy of the honours list was in effect satirical. It must have been about this time that Mr. Max Beerbohm called him " England's Scourge." Since then he has become the scourge of Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Shaw and other old acquaintances. His appearances as a dramatist have been few, and perhaps the fault lies less with the theatre than with the author. For his satire bites too keenly and sees not far enough. He is aware of hypocrisy, and he sees dishonest people. He is aware of nepotism, and he sees corrupt people. He is aware of snobbery, and he sees mean-souled people. He sets vices upon two legs and bids them walk. In *Mary Goes First* the vain, the pompous, the tedious, the lethargic and the quarrelsome make their exits and their entrances through the solitary door that Mr. Jones, accomplished technician as ever, has provided. They are excellent butts, but poor companions. We laugh at them very freely, but with them seldom. We miss the vision that makes them not only justifiable, but inevitable. In one

of Goldsmith's essays on comedy is the passage : "A friend of mine, who was sitting unmoved at one of these sentimental Pieces, was asked how he could be so indifferent. 'Why, truly,' says he, 'as the Hero is but a Tradesman, it is indifferent to me whether he be turned out of his Counting-house on Fish-street Hill, since he will still have enough left to open shop in St. Giles's.'" For sentimental you may read satirical, or tragical, or comic ; it is all one, if the hero be but a tradesman or the heroine a hussy. The unknown gentleman was a good critic.

Maurice Maeterlinck

The original admirers of Maeterlinck were fortunate in having but one hero to worship—the dramatist of the series of plays from *La Princesse Maleine* to *Aglavaine et Sélysette* and the poet who repeopled the enchanted forest of Brochelande, so long tenanted only by the ghosts of chivalric history, with the living fears and aspirations of the subconscious soul. That the author should likewise have been a moralist was not unnatural. Truth, it is said, lies at the bottom of a well, and a great part of legendary forest-lore is centred in wells and fountains. It is upon their marble rim that Maeterlinck's lovers lean to converse in tremulous tones, fearful lest malignant Fate should snatch away their happiness into the shadow of the trees ; and it is into their depths that his venerable sages peer for enlightenment. The well of truth may be

said to be the very heart of these early dramas. All of the characters are moralists. They seek the hidden spring with eyes that are timorous indeed, but frank and childlike. Their author also, with eyes innocent of metaphysical guile, sought the springs of wisdom and destiny and promised to his readers an excavation of the treasures of humility ; while with eyes as innocent of scientific speculation he enquired into the riddle of the beehive or the secrets of the kennel.

Monna Vanna came, and the Maeterlinckian characters emerged from the shades of their forests into the glare of the plain. They were still mediæval in semblance, but at heart they were moderns. This drama of beleaguered Pisa is problematic. It weighs life against death, reason against instinct, common interest against personal pride, humane ideals against human impulses. A woman's honour is to be bartered for the lives of a brave garrison. "Do what this madman asks," Marco urges Guido, "and the deed that seems to you hideous will seem heroic to those who survive. Death is often easier than life." That is truly said, and yet the opposition of honour and dishonour does not escape banality. The truth of *Monna Vanna* lies near the surface, and the well of inspiration is proportionately shallow. Had Vanna not gone "naked beneath her cloak" to the tent of Prinzivalle, she would have made but little stir in the world.

Since then Maeterlinck has given us plays of

singular variety and baffling uniformity. The spirit of symbolism, that rare and shy bird, is vanished, and the trace that remains in *The Blue Bird* and *The Betrothal* will scarcely suffice to animate an abstract noun. Joy, Destiny and Light are made allegorical figures. Children tell us that "there are no dead," and they add that "what we see is nothing." It is true that the imagination is held by what we do not see, such as fate in *Pelléas* or fear in *Les Aveugles*. The abstract nouns of these children's epics are seen, alas! too clearly. The spirit of naturalism, though it be invoked in *The Burgomaster of Stilemonde*, is scarcely at the author's call. There is a necessary element of unexpectedness in naturalistic art, but here it is always the expected that happens, always the expected that is said. We think of Blue Books and White Books and gallant little Belgium under the invader's heel. We become interested in a drama of situation that has nothing to do with the drama of character, and in the end are left rather numbed by the scrupulous fairness and essential commonplace of this work of filial devotion.

John Masefield

"Better defeat than death" is the modern watchword. It has been echoed wittily in *Arms and the Man*, mockingly in *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, sweetly in *Monna Vanna*, defiantly in a score of realistic dramas. The heroic impulse was renewed in a world at war; but even as the brave journalists

flourished their pens in encouragement and the brave bishops fluttered their lawn sleeves in benediction, grey stumbling columns of prisoners came back from agony into the quiet of summer afternoons. The will to live was in them. Through avenues of dead trees they went stumbling, to Amiens and Douai, to Chalons and Metz ; and the whisper ran that they were fortunate, these men who had held up their hands. In one year more it might have been a shout. Yes, there is much to be said for this unheroic gospel. There is more in it than pusillanimity. For good or ill it is the philosophy of our age. It spells reaction against false heroics, but it proclaims also a courageous belief in life. In denying it we must in some sort deny our own inheritance. We must submit to be torn from the common tree, and trust to our own vitality for taking root afresh.

Such a bough torn from the spirit of his time is Mr. Masefield. He has felt the wrench, as a certain sadness in him testifies. But with the moderns he has no drop of sap in common. Their ways are not his ways, and their speech is not his speech (though oaths be sprinkled never so freely over his pages). In the days of *The Campden Wonder* and *The Tragedy of Nan*, it seemed that he might write a naturalistic drama of that much-romanticised class, the English peasantry. He gave us instead the *femme incomprise* of rural tradition and the authentic gaffer (newly edited) of historical practice. In the days of *Pompey the Great* it seemed

that he might write a historical drama. But this Pompey, like Mr. Shaw's Cæsar, is a propagandist. If he were less noble, he might be called a pamphleteer. He is the heroic rejoinder to the modern argument, the pontifical counterblast to modern heresies. "There are three sorts of people in the world," declares Napoleon in *The Man of Destiny*, "the low people, the middle people, and the high people. The low people and the high people are alike in one thing; they have no scruples, no morality. The low are beneath morality, the high above it." But Pompey's faith is summed up in the phrases "Life requires a dignity," "The upright soul is safe," "Death cannot crush what comprehends Heaven." He sees Rome as a "splendid city full of lights," a quality of greatness, a collective will asserting truth, maintaining peace, enforcing law. For that city he lives and dies. Yes, this Pompey is an empire-builder. He fails to be a great dramatic figure, but the failure is nearly magnificent. We touch his weakness in the explicit character of his creed. Self-explanation is his downfall. When he looks into Cornelia's eyes with the words "There will be always peace for me in that calm soul" we feel that the author indulges an effeminacy fatal to the tragic sense. If the choice be thrust upon us we must prefer Mr. Shaw's Cæsar and Napoleon to this Pompey. They are less noble but more human.

Somerset Maugham

Mr. Somerset Maugham remains young while other dramatists of his generation grow old ; and the reason must be that his plays are not only invented but felt. His admirable comedies, and even his efforts at exalted melodrama, flow from an emotional reservoir that we must respect. Were it a well and not a reservoir he would be a greater dramatist ; but we are conscious that it has been filled by the resolute shedding of illusions rather than by the gentle rains of heaven. The waters are not without bitterness, if this inevitable word must be spoken ; but we should be grateful that they are left unsweetened. The peaty flavour has its merits : at least it will never cloy the palate.

Another noticeable quality of Mr. Maugham is his gift for taking the distant view. He regards England with the keenly critical eye of the remittance man enjoying the blessings of British citizenship in a Wild-Western saloon. It is all Home, certainly, but by no means all Beauty. He is not enamoured of the rose-garden, the vicarage tennis-party and all the babble of insipidity that cheers the soul of your sentimental exile. He is not fond of the "pukka" gentleman and the "pukka" lady ; indeed, they bore him. He looks upon the country house and sees that it is far from good ; therefore he writes a better comedy of the country house than the dramatist whose ambition it is to be called upon by the best people and found a county

family. He looks upon the drawing-room and sees that it differs little from Patagonia ; therefore he writes a better comedy of the drawing-room than the dramatist whose ambition it is to move out of Earl's Court into Kensington.

The world of experience, the world of the rolling stone has interested him deeply, and he has something to say of what he has seen. It is better said implicitly than explicitly—better said in *The Circle* than in *East of Suez*, better said in *Our Better*s than in *The Unknown*. A certain lightness suits him best. Yet he never fails to respect the characters he creates ; he will never compromise their essential nature for the sake of a situation. A resolute intellectual honesty gives them whatever dignity they possess.

Sir Arthur Pinero

Beneath the surface of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, beneath the easy man-about-town philosophy that pervades it, beneath the small talk of the parish of St. James's, the dreary wit and wisdom of Cayley Drummle, the spotless shirt-front of Aubrey Tanqueray's soul, or the tawdry shimmer of Paula herself, there lies a tragedy. It is the tragedy of a woman corrupted by luxury in the midst of a society corrupted by prejudice. She is the victim of her own ignoble ambitions, but also of the cruelty, the vulgarity, and the stupidity of others. She flings her life to them as a carcase is flung to jackals, and enters the portal of some

blessed Paradise where Magdalens and visiting-cards are unknown. But is this the play that Sir Arthur Pinero actually wrote? It is not. He identified himself, in spite of his better nature, with the prejudices of the world into which Paula Tanqueray so incredibly stepped—with the egregious respectability of Aubrey, with the minatory trumpetings of Cayley Drummle to his fellows of the smoke-room herd. He threw Paula to the Victorians, and made her fate a mock tragedy that satisfied the proprieties. Still beneath the surface we see the wayward and dangerous woman who is the spirit of intelligence in the play because she alone appreciates the bitter comedy of her situation and suffers under its tragic ironies. She is the Hedda Gabler of her shocking set.

Georges de Porto-Riche

The theatre of Porto-Riche is a theatre of grown-up children, in which are played the comedies of unreason and the tragedies of instinct. The children will have it that they are reasonable, cultivated beings, and perhaps for a decade or more they have behaved as such; but one fine day the crust of cultivation gives way and they are sent floundering, not indeed into the lava of elemental passions, but into a slough of abandoned dignity and lost self-respect. The measure of their cultivation is the measure of their fall. There is nothing remarkable in the sprawling posture and bedraggled condition of the protagonists; these are the com-

monplaces of the "stronger" school of French drama. But when MM. Hervieu or Bernstein or Bataille seek to interest us in the misfortunes of their characters, we are conscious that the perpendicular fall is not considerable, loud though the splash may be. With Porto-Riche it is otherwise. There is a prodigious contrast between his characters before and after the catastrophe. They are so kindly, so witty and agreeable, so eminently reasonable, men and women alike. It is monstrous, we feel, that the jealousies of sex or the outbursts of smouldering egoism should have power to deform these godlike creatures—that this man of forty-five who has but lately covered his adipose figure with a garment of dignity should be stripped naked before our eyes, or this woman of thirty who has emancipated herself alike from passions and vices should be changed in a twinkling into a sodden drab. But that is Porto-Riche's theme. He studies the irony of failure to play the cultivated part. The old Adam comes uppermost, not only in his comedy of *Le Vieil Homme*, but also in *Amoureuse*, in *Le Passe*, in others of his brief but honourable list of plays.

Arthur Schnitzler

Schnitzler's *Reigen* (A Round Dance), the performance of which has brought him so much notoriety, is one of the minor curiosities of modern literature. Without being itself an erotic work it offers us the inevitable sequel to the erotic tale,

the logical epilogue to the passionate scene, the classical outcome of the romantic adventure. Eastern philosophers, astonished by the amorous conventions of our Western stage, have been known to enquire why the physical embrace of hero and heroine is not prolonged to a natural issue. Our reply has always been that these matters are governed by the laws of good taste ; whereat the Eastern philosophers smile. But whatever degree of good taste, or lack of it, is displayed by our authors of comedy and light opera, we may look to Schnitzler's sequel to their tale for the refinement born of a purely psychological interest in the situation. To his mind the most intimate of human relationships must be one of the most interesting ; and he is content to take the subject as he finds it, stripped of all provocative trappings and reduced to its elements of action and reaction. The student of Brantôme and Casanova, or even the reader of *Histoire Comique* and *Le Lys Rouge* will find *Reigen* to be (save for its asterisks) an exceedingly modest work. In performance it gives only the impression of an analysis of motive. It is not for nothing that Schnitzler has been a physician. His professional dignity is maintained even at the bedside of two most refractory patients.

The " round dance " is executed by ten couples, consisting in all of ten persons, each doubly linked. They are a street-walker and a soldier ; the soldier and a parlourmaid ; the parlourmaid and a young gentleman ; the young gentleman and a young wife ;

the young wife and her husband ; the husband and a girl friend ; the girl friend and a poet ; the poet and an actress ; the actress and a nobleman ; the nobleman and the street-walker. The closed chain may stand as symbol for the chain of instinct that shackles all of them. Schnitzler's examination of the sex motive is remorseless, but it is honest.

Another such chain, politer in character, is that which links the scenes of *Anatol*. Here Schnitzler peeps, with his witty-melancholic air, into the crater of extinct *liaisons*. We are invited to stroll with him along the brink, to pluck a flower or two that the wind has sown among the ashes, to reflect on past fires and present coolness, and to smile at the oddity of humankind or maybe even to drop an unsentimental tear. The subject is well enough, the treatment masterly. The Vienna of *Anatol* and *Liebelei* is the Vienna of the waltz and the fan, of graceful living and high diplomacy. It matters little that these things are of the past, for Schnitzler is an artist who, like his hero Casanova, has ensured himself a certain immortality. But *Reigen* remains his philosophical achievement, if not his dramatic masterpiece ; for in it he speaks his whole mind and speaks it freely.

Bernard Shaw

Mr. Shaw is not only the sincerest, but the most consistent of the moderns. A dispensation of Nature, he declares, endowed him with the "normal vision" that is shared only by a tenth part of man-

kind, while the remaining nine-tenths enjoy the illusions or the blessings of abnormality. Such a man cannot be other than "advanced," to use the idiom of Jack Tanner; and our confidence in him rests on the knowledge that he will never be reactionary. He is not the kind of author who "goes red" at twenty-five and turns true blue by forty. Were all the world afflicted by abnormal vision, his perceptions would still be normal. He was advanced in the eighteen-nineties, when he so gloriously mistook Ibsen for a borough councillor with feminist leanings. He was advanced in the nineteen-hundreds, when he sought to reconcile the Puritans to the theatre by the simple means of writing them plays. He was advanced in the nineteen-tens, when he abjured the errors of Darwinism and discovered the basis of a new theology in the theory of Lamarck. He is still advanced in the nineteen-twenties, when Chekhov moves him to *Heartbreak House* and the glandular hypothesis (*alias* creative evolution) inspires *Back to Methusaleh*. He has outlived two generations of younger writers and is still the youngest of them.

Such is the rejuvenating quality of a pure intelligence. "I declare," says Jack Tanner, in a line that will one day give pause to the commentators, "I declare that according to my experience moral passion is the only real passion." There is the creed in a phrase. Moral passion spells indignation against an immoral world—against hypocrisy and lying, prostitution and slavery,

poverty and dirt and disorder. Social indignation underlies *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Major Barbara*, political indignation is the divine spark of *Man and Superman* and *Heartbreak House*, moral indignation gives life to the scientific persiflage of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, religious indignation burns in *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet* and again in *Methuselah*. We are reminded of some other-worldly and incredible phenomenon, like a snow-clad volcano in eruption. But for this solitary passion, all is frozen thought.

Yet how sincerity shines through this rarefied and mistless air ! There were once people who thought Mr. Shaw trivial because he was witty, and shallow because he was paradoxical. They were the victims of his intellectual feat of necromancy, which is that of showing the reverse side of everything—the rusty obverse of the romantic shield, the worm-eaten frame of the Old Master, and the back garden of the suburban villa on washing-day with the clothes hanging out. It was thus that he approached the glamour of warfare in *Arms and the Man*, the dignity of history in *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, or the romance of sex in *Getting Married*. The gesture is a moralist's, impish though it be. These unromantic heroes, of whom Bluntschli with his "ten thousand knives and forks and the same quantity of dessert spoons," must be accounted the chieftain, have a significance that goes beyond their own age. They challenge the received opinion not only of to-day, but of yesterday and to-morrow.

They have the *Ewigkeitszug*. Their voice echoes from the corridors of some far Utopia of the intellect; and what matter if the goal be never reached?

August Strindberg

In his dramatic youth Strindberg cried lustily for a theatre "where we can be shocked by what is horrible, where we can laugh at what is laughable, where we can see life without shrinking back in terror if what has hitherto lain veiled behind theological or æsthetic preconceptions be suddenly revealed to us." This was in effect the naturalistic ideal, qualified by the dramatist's own corollary that "true naturalism seeks out those vital points where the greatest conflicts befall." The words, at once naïve and thunderous, passionate and confused, sum up the spirit of the man. The importance of the naturalistic challenge to contemporary drama was rather æsthetic than moral. It was a greater beauty that was brought into the theatre by Hauptmann's farmers and weavers or by Ibsen's Hedda and Lady from the Sea, and not a greater truth that was revealed to the world by the conversations of Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving. Indeed, now that we listen after many years to these conversations, so pregnant with platitude, they almost recall the conventional utterances of the theatre of Sardou and the younger Dumas. The beauty lies in the design, the delineation, and the "breath of ancient sagas" in which

the characters have their being. But to the mind of Strindberg, himself in the forefront of the battle, there was never any doubt of the moral significance of his cause or of the tremendous disclosure of truth that would ensue if once the veil of “theological or æsthetic preconceptions” were rent asunder by a crusader’s lance. It mattered little that the leaders were facing different ways—Ibsen towards woman’s emancipation, Strindberg towards her subjection, Hauptmann towards a righting of proletarian wrongs, the Scandinavians in general towards the creation of a new aristocracy of thought, Frenchmen towards the “cruel comedy,” the Russians towards the naturalism of the emotions that took shape eventually in Chekhov. Strindberg believed in himself and, therefore, believed in his mission. He was always a pioneer—not only in those early days when he laid a Norseman’s axe to the roots of *bourgeois* prejudice, or in the middle period when he clove through the shell encasing the history of the historians, but also in the period of *Towards Damascus* and the dream-plays where he sought the light of a clearing in his imaginative forest. He may never be appreciated at his worth, for all the causes he embraced were unpopular. He was an anti-feminist in the age of *A Doll’s House*, an epic dramatist in the age of social drama, a mystic in the age of fact and argument. He was at once poet and logician, realist and idealist, sceptic and passionate believer. He was not only a man, but a multitude; not only a world in himself, but an

elemental chaos. His life was a great subjective drama, his art an eruption of vital forces.

Hermann Sudermann

There was a time when even Sudermann was numbered among the prophets. *Die Ehre* (Honour) with its ridicule of duelling, must have seemed dangerously subversive in the eyes of the Prussian officer of 1890. Its merchant hero with his own code of honour is even a dim foreshadowing of the chocolate-cream soldier ("Believe me, my dear lady, our duty is to live as long as we can"). But this hero does not speak to us, like Bluntschli, from the concrete corridors of future commonwealths ; he only creates a disturbance in the nineteenth-century drawing-room. We catch no echoes of eternity in the harshness of the utterance. We taste no salt of humour in the man. *Heimat* (Magda) was in 1893 a document of progress and a rallying cry for the emancipation of women. Its extrinsic truth for a while concealed its intrinsic falsehood ; but now it is a parlour melodrama in which talented actresses display their technique and test their sincerity. We may call it the queen of parlour melodramas. The grey-bearded Junker patriarch thunders and shakes his palsied fist ; the spitfire aunt squares her shoulders to the fray ; the mouse of a younger daughter creeps mouse-like in and out ; the red-bearded councillor who is the villain of the piece mingles his threats with pious unction ; the pastor (and how excellent a pastor !) renounces

and renounces, and, like most self-sacrificers, shows a painful willingness to sacrifice others ; while the shimmering Magda pleads and challenges, cajoles and defies, defends her own freedom and in the wreck of a family saves her own soul. Some virtues we still discover in her, of which courage is the first. But this woman scarcely belongs to the generation of *Hedda Gabler* ; she is rather a late flowering of the *Dame aux Camélias*. Every generation of young playgoers must go through the experience of finding her out. The lengthiness of the business promises to Sudermann a certain vogue with posterity.

J. M. Synge

The Playboy was born into a barren and disputatious time. Synge told us that “in a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or an apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips to poetry.” But his were the only plays that were so flavoured. His was a voice crying in the wilderness of naturalism, his was an art casting sudden images in a theatre of dusty argument. He wrote for noble idlers, not for busybodies. He was capable of great tenderness, and also of cruelty ; of meanness never. There is a fine reserve in every line of his wit. He loved and hated his characters, but at the same time he respected them. Synge was fortunate in his Ireland. He lived among simple folk with simple values. He moved in an established

order of society like Chaucer at the court of Edward III or Molière in the gardens of Versailles ; and the narrower his sphere, the nearer grew his kinship with the world stage.

Frank Wedekind

Frühlings Erwachen, that poignant “children’s tragedy,” remains after twenty years the measure of Wedekind’s erratic genius. The power of the play lies in a childlike simplicity, a sympathy with youth, an understanding of ignorance, an incomprehension of knowledge, and a marshalling of secret memories such as few men have the imagination to attempt or the courage to achieve. The dramatist lives with his children. He goes to school again with them, sits at the desk, whispers and nudges his neighbour, makes friends, wanders in the woods, creeps into the hay-loft, exchanges confidences, feels all the shyness, the curiosity, the cruelty of his companions. He does not recall the intimacies of his childhood, as other men do, with distaste or shame. He forgets every standpoint of the grown man. He lays aside reserve, so that this drama is full of passages repulsive to the cold adult intelligence. It is not a play for the stage ; these broken scenes are a dramatic epic. Nor is it a play to be described and analysed. We may regret that the subject was not handled by another than Wedekind ; that these sombre, introspective children should be so manifestly the embryo heroes and heroines of his later drama ;

and yet *Frühlings Erwachen* has power and beauty. Wedekind himself was always something of a child. He was born old and never grew up. He prattled precociously of ideas and opinions ; he pulled a long nose at modern Germany. His logic was the terrible logic of the inquisitive urchin. His fabulous characters were coloured by the romance of the penny dreadful. He chalked indecent legends on the public walls. He shouted "Whip behind !" to grave drivers of a hearse conveying graver mutes. He mimicked the tramp of a grenadier and the stoop of a Privatdozent. He pulled the door-bell of philosophy and ran away. While he lived he was regarded by his countrymen, through peering goggles, as a social enigma or a problem of morbid psychology. Brochures and treatises were written about him. Specialists in insanity gave their weighty verdicts ; judges thundered against the man and all his works. He was an actor (and a shocking bad one), an adventurer, an impresario, a satirist, an educational reformer, an ex-prisoner (or, as he would have said, gaolbird), and a man with a monstrous grievance. He was a tragi-comedian, but also a poet.

We see him now as a forerunner and prophet of a revolt against realism. His strident voice disturbed the quiet of a stage where Hauptmann's carters and milkmaids, like Fuhrmann Henschel and Rosa Bernd, were going about their work in the Silesian dawn. His interminable dramas of masquerading adventurers (*Der Marquis von Keith*), criminals

(*Die Büchse der Pandora*), erotic adventuresses (*Erdgeist*), prophets of a new morality (*Hidalla*), or clowns and mystics (*Oaha, Der Stein der Weisen*) were the reduction to absurdity of the realistic method. They were a question-mark scrawled against the current conception of dramatic art. The war came, and Wedekind's name was no longer heard, unless when some learned propagandist in the Allied cause linked him with Nietzsche and Treitschke among the prime monsters of German frightfulness. Wedekind died before the struggle was ended. His greatest contribution to drama had been a technique of expression, a certain arresting style in utterance that marked an abrupt break with the old tradition. Thenceforward crystallisation, and not representation, was to be the watchword of the younger dramatist. Wedekind sought a philosophy and discovered an idiom.

H. Wiers-Jenssen

The impression made by *The Witch* is powerful rather than deep—the effect of a succession of thunder-claps. The spectator is numbed rather than moved. There are four acts, and at the end of each comes a moment of intense horror. In the first, a woman denounced as a witch is dragged from the stage to be burned alive. In the second the young wife of a Lutheran pastor, herself descended from a family tainted by witchcraft, summons her stepson by an hypnotic effort of will and throws herself into his arms. In the

third, facing her husband, she wishes him dead, and he dies of shock. And in the fourth, standing by his coffin to clear herself of the charge of black magic, she goes mad and gibbers over his body.

The scene is Bergen, in the sixteenth century, and Wiers-Jenssen exploits superstition in the modern manner. He explains nothing away, and yet he lacks reticence. He disbelieves nothing, and yet he lacks reverence—perhaps because he also believes nothing. All the power of the play depends upon other people's beliefs, seen in a glass darkly, reflected in a more credulous age. An unsophisticated audience would probably not care greatly for *The Witch* ; it would be conscious of the author's own sophistication ; and in these matters of belief and disbelief the simplest mind is the surest guide.

A woman confesses, for example, that she has “known Satan and borne him devils.” Hallucination, we say, or priestly terrorism ; nothing remains of the statement but a single uncanny thrill. The wife whispers her lover's name and he comes to her. We are thrilled again—but all the more vividly for being sceptical. Afterwards, we know, there will be talk of thought-transference and telepathy. The wife wishes her husband dead, and his eyes are frozen, his body stiffens. Poor man, we know already that his heart is weak ; it has failed him. She goes mad beside the coffin ; but who would not go mad in such an ordeal ?

The thrills are fleeting, but they may be accepted gratefully—if only their nature be understood.

To look for more in *The Witch* is to misunderstand the play. This is in no sense a drama of character, and it has no depth; ramparts of fear and credulity divide the *dramatis personæ* from one another; at heart all are monstrous egoists, thinking only of how their immortal souls will scrape into the Lutheran heaven or escape the Lutheran hell. All, perhaps, but the old mother, who loves her son; and she is almost as shrewdly sceptical as the audience; a finely crusted egoist, too, in her hatred of interlopers. *The Witch* is a melodrama for sophisticated people.

Oscar Wilde

Wilde's plays, with the exception of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, show lamentable signs of wear. They have many virtues that our stage can ill afford to lose. They please the ear always, the mind very often. They help to maintain a standard of dramatic writing. The emptiest of their epigrams are not altogether worthless, because they reflect a world where all is artificial. Like dandies and well-dressed women, they gratify a sense of fitness. Glancing at them, we feel with Dulaure's marchioness: "Depend upon it, sir, God thinks twice before damning a man of that quality." Time, we must hope, will think twice before forgetting Lord Goring and others of Wilde's gallery. But such figures apart, how can *An Ideal*

Husband escape oblivion? Or *Lady Windermere's Fan*? Or *A Woman of no Importance*? Wilde chose to write august and wooden melodramas spangled with wit and comedy; and he did so, not because he was wholly insincere, but because there was a strain of the second-rate in his talent. He offended just where he claimed never to offend—in lack of discrimination, in artistic taste. The final paradox of his career is that we forgive him his seriousness for the sake of his triviality. We forget *Salome* and remember *Bunbury*.

Emile Zola

Thérèse Raquin is Sophoclean tragedy in a bed-sitting-room. The conception of Fate is too vast and too awful for the mould. It overpowers the mind of Zola, who begins with quiet, naturalistic drama and ends with two giant figures of his own creation gibbering at each other in a spiritual frenzy. This murderer and murderess, who have been lover and mistress and become husband and wife, are transfigured by the horror of their deed rather than by any pains lavished upon their character, by the dramatist. As individuals we scarcely know them. They are murderers and stand beyond the human pale. We know their victim, the husband, well enough. He is a stubby little shopkeeper who sits for a portrait in his best clothes, and buys champagne for three francs "at a sale," and plays dominoes every Thursday evening with his cronies, and fumbles at his lips in terror

when an accident is mentioned. Such a man, we know, will meet with an accident ; and the knowledge softens us towards him. But these silent and terrible creatures who move catlike in the shadows of the room, ready to spring, are at first no more than symbols of the animal passion that possesses them. It is only when the deed is done that their personality begins to awaken. It is only when vengeance threatens in the shape of the paralysed old mother, seeking to betray them with her eyes, that the spirit of exaltation enters in. And then they speak for God and Fate rather than for themselves. They are tremendous revulsions against a crime, uplifted fingers of portentous warning. *Thérèse Raquin* is a profoundly moral play. If it no longer seems to be a great play, that is because the technique of Ibsen passed it by in a single stride. In *The Wild Duck* or *Rosmersholm* we find no trivial "Nebenpersonen" such as the domino-playing visitors of Zola ; the characters are interwoven into a single fabric of absorbing interest. Chekhov, who may have been the last of the naturalists, went far beyond the conversation of these puppet characters ; he gave an ultimate meaning to life's irrelevancies. But *Thérèse Raquin* should not be forgotten. It is a masterly triumph of elemental drama over method.

REALISTS

REALISTS

St. John Ervine

WITH *Mixed Marriage* Mr. Ervine brought practical politics into the Irish theatre. Where Synge had sought eternal symbols behind the mask of peasant character, where W. B. Yeats had dreamed of dead queens shrouded in the mists of folklore, where Lady Gregory had invested her villagers and paupers with Molièresque fantasy, this inquisitive and hard-headed Ulsterman evoked dramatic interest in what are properly called realities, namely questions of the day and events recorded in the newspapers. Had Synge composed a drama on the theme of the parish pump, we may guess that it would have yielded copious waters of bitterness. Had Yeats embowered that useful monument in his mythological forest, it would assuredly have become a sacred fountain of the national spirit. Had Lady Gregory shed the light of her humour on the subject, she would have given us a tale of a dead cat in the well and an uproarious Hibernian feud of villagers. But of Mr. Ervine it may be said with rude justice that to him the parish pump is a parish pump and nothing more. He would have men come to it decently and

quietly, each carrying his own bucket and waiting his own turn. He would have orderly and civil conversation round the pump, with no exchange of taunts about the Pope of Rome or the Battle of the Boyne. He would have women treated as equals and friends, and not as romantic heroines or downtrodden drudges. He would have no rich and poor around the pump, but only good citizens. And because these things are not so, because the pump is the centre of a sweaty mob seeking to grab the handle, because louts are chalking blasphemies on the village walls and women are weeping in the doorways, he is filled with indignation. It is a just indignation. It has in it something of the passion with which Mr. Shaw regards a world of stupidity and disorder, though it lacks the other Irishman's sauce of wit. It is indignation *sans façon*, if not *sans phrase*. Nevertheless it is a positive quality, a compelling force.

Brought to the service of the stage, this dramatic voice of indignation reverberated with particular effect. It is true there was nothing fresh in the matters that created the disturbance of the moment around the parish pump. They were the old questions of north and south, Catholic and Protestant, capital and labour. In one form or another they were as old as Irish history. But being political or practical, they were precisely the questions that had not interested the writers of the Irish National Theatre. Mr. Ervine's way of dealing with them hit the fancy of the Dublin

playgoer, who was able to enjoy the paradox of an Ulsterman for whom Protestants were as superstitious as Catholics, and Catholics as bigoted as Protestants. Moreover the play was eventful and poignant. It showed, if not deep tragic feeling, at least a sense of the national tragedy of futility.

John Ferguson is another play of Mr. Ervine's native Ulster—a work in all outward characteristics more mature, in action more plausible, in portraiture more adept. The moral is curiously and not altogether happily blended with the tale. A tendency appears to make this character or that a *raisonneur* of the piece, an explanatory chorus and commentator. Good plays need no *raisonneur*; he was a device of the playwright who could not explain himself; and whether the character be a bland man-about-town or a dour Bible-reading Ulsterman makes very little difference to his superfluity.

Mr. Ervine has to beware of creating mouth-pieces in the guise of characters. He shows a fondness especially for silver-haired old ladies who sit in armchairs and paralyse the spectator by their monumental and ineffable rightness. These are the bane of the theatre. One of them gives a list to his post-war drama called *The Ship*.

But *Jane Clegg*, with which he invaded the English theatre, is surely the prime achievement of realism on our stage. Here, too, the passion of social indignation is felt, but it is conveyed into channels of individual pity for the individual fate. We come out of the theatre with a deep respect

(if little love) for Jane Clegg ; and with some regard also for her lamentable husband Henry, and his old mother, and the bookie to whom he lost the larger part of his salary as a commercial traveller, and the “ fancy woman ” with whom, when he was ultimately branded as a thief and liar, a dishonest employee and a faithless husband, he went off to Canada. In the world of the Clegg family these happenings are inevitable. This is a play of feeling ; let those who live on cheap illusions call it sordid. I find that it satisfies one of the ultimate tests of excellence in a play ; it arouses a desire to live with the characters.

One of the tributes we must pay to the author’s observation is an absorbing interest in the disreputable Henry, even at the expense of the injured Jane. Henry Clegg, with his shuffle, and his slovenliness, and his glass of supper beer, and his cigarette cocked up at the corner of his mouth in the moment of deep disgrace, is in his way Everyman. His steps on the downward road are easily followed. First comes the girl (his wife being too chilly and unsympathetic for his liking), then the bookie, then the customer’s cheque sent to him by mistake, and lastly the thought of embezzling the money and making a bolt for it, girl and all. His baseness is gently unfolded to us by a masterly hand, and it is not until we have grown rather to like Henry Clegg that we understand him completely. His defence (if it can be called a defence) has force in it. “ I’m not a bad

chap, really," he says, "I'm just weak. I'd be all right if I had a lot of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am. Oh ! I know, Jane ! You *are* better than I am. Any fool can see that ! It doesn't do a chap much good to be living with a woman who's his superior—at least not the sort of chap I am. I ought to have married a woman like myself, or a bit worse. That's what Kitty is. She's worse than I am, and that sort of makes me love her. It's different with you. I always feel mean here. Yes, I am mean, I know that ; but it makes me meaner than I really am to be living with you. Do you understand, Jane ? Somehow, the mean things I do that don't amount to much, I can't tell 'em to you, or carry 'em off as if they weren't mean, and I do meaner things to cover 'em up. That's the way of it. I don't act like that with Kitty." Perhaps Henry Clegg would not have said every word of this. But that he feels it there is no doubt. The speech is in essence true.

A play of the practical politics of life, coarse-grained in structure, fine-grained in treatment. The impulse of it belongs to the last decade, almost to the last generation, when we were all realists and practical politicians. Will Mr. Ervine rediscover the impulse in the present time, or is he already confronted by the question mark that the theatre sets before the realistic author ? It matters perhaps little under which banner he enlists himself, for so long as his just indignation endures, the root of the matter is in him.

C. K. Munro

The detachment of Mr. Munro's work may conceal its profoundly realistic nature. We look for a certain human weakness in authors, a leaning to the point of view of this character or that, a touch of favouritism or at least a hint of friendliness. The impersonal spirit is always vaguely disquieting. Even photographers, as they bid us look our best, permit themselves the encouragement of a smile. Even dentists pass the time of day with us, and the knowledge that they live in Surbiton and are fond of gardening seems oddly to diminish their terrors. But the realism of Mr. Munro, while it is no crueler and is certainly no more sordid than that of other dramatists, preserves an indefinable atmosphere of aloofness. It is impossible to conjure up a human impression of this writer, unless it be as the man in the corner of the railway carriage who speaks to nobody and to whom nobody speaks. The pettiness of our conversation seems to be passed in review before him. His presence is at once unwelcome and salutary ; we fear him, but we seek his good opinion. Were this listener to vouchsafe any remark, however trifling, we should turn to him with the greatest deference ; but he is obstinately silent, and his eyes travel gravely from one to another of us. It would be idle to pretend that we like this individual, and we are relieved when he unexpectedly alights at some wayside station. There, we say to ourselves, goes

a detached realist. Thank God we are not such as he, but have neighbourly blood in our veins ! The herd instinct is strong enough to make us reason in this fashion, and it never occurs to us that the explanation of the fellow-passenger's reserve may be his shyness. It may be that he yearned to join in the conversation, but dared not. It may be that a remoteness from other men is his inevitable destiny.

So it may be with the impersonal dramatist. There is so much shyness in the world that an author's shyness of his own creatures is scarcely surprising. There are some writers who have no sooner set a man upon two legs and bidden him walk than they slap him on the back, and link their arm familiarly in his, and proceed to make him a butt or a mouthpiece or a domestic convenience as occasion serves. Not so the deeper realist, like Mr. Munro. His courtesy toward his imaginary personages is carried almost to a fault. Consider the charming character of Miss Shoe in the comedy *At Mrs. Beam's*. Here is a figure almost purely farcical, a fountain of delusions, a bottomless well of garrulity ; and yet her author seems all the while to be listening attentively and politely. " You were saying ? " he seems to interpose at each breathless interval of her monologue. Depend upon it, if Miss Shoe met Mr. Munro in the Bayswater boarding-house she thought him a very, very nice young man.

No one, perhaps, has written such a comedy of

a boarding-house—so admirably free from the vulgarity of the study as well as the vulgarity of the kitchen. We dread the subject because we know what dramatists can do with it. We shudder at the thought of the wilderness of dyed hair and false teeth and dropped h's in which we may be asked to wander ; we shrink from the thought of the charwomen who will brandish cold legs of mutton and invoke the memory of their departed husbands. But Mr. Munro does not write that sort of play. He is more interested in life than in vulgarity. His comedy has an unusual delicacy suggesting the essence and not the substance of the matter portrayed. Yet the treatment does not lack breadth. All the familiar grotesques of the boarding-house parlour are there, such as the inquisitive spinster (Miss Shoe herself), the deaf old harridan, the young man with the gramophone, and even the senile drunkard. There is no particular merit in the plot, concerning as it does a newly-arrived couple who are taken for a Bluebeard and victim, but turn out to be a thief and accomplice. It is made interesting by Mr. Munro's natural gift for presentation, and especially by his reserve.

The immense canvas of *The Rumour* is crowded with statesmen, diplomats, armament kings, financiers, merchants and common men. The occasion is a middle-European war between two small nations who are the tools of big business and big politics. A pardonable nervousness about capital sunk in one of the countries gives birth to the

rumour that the other is contemplating an attack. It grows and reverberates. It reaches the evening paper placards and rattles amid thoughts of cucumber frames in the minds of clerks homeward bound to Muswell Hill. In Middle Europe it sets the cafés chattering and brawling. Ancient feuds revive and shots are fired. An Englishwoman falls to a chance bullet from a mob in the land of sunken capital. The rumour grows again ; her death is made the first atrocity of the invasion that follows. Public opinion is stirred ; big business and the Press wait on the Premier in Downing Street. Labour waits on him, too, with futile threats. The City raises regiments. The rumour swells into reality ; we go to war. Months afterwards, at the Peace Conference, a patriot statesman of the victorious land of sunken capital tries to save his country from the clutch—urbane but most tenacious—of the Allied diplomats on either hand. He fails ; but the group pose for the camera in outward harmony, and an elderly general is wakened from his afternoon nap to gird on a Sam Browne and bow to the multitude from a balcony. And Jones (or is it Smith ?), who meditated on cucumber frames, loses a son in the war ; and the troops come home again ; and old Ned, the biggest of big business men, who is not such a donkey as he looks, says that the right side always wins, nowadays. It cannot afford not to win ; there is too much at stake.

This is a play in the grand manner, a play crammed

with thought, perhaps the only play of these few years that links the stage of England with the stage of Europe. And yet Mr. Munro remains for the present a realist. If he were not a realist he would go farther. There is no room in the theatre for the mass of detail, verbal as well as visible, that he projects upon the stage with so much truthfulness. We cry for bread and are given a granary.

Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill, an American with more than twenty plays to his name, has been claimed already by several schools, including that vague aggregation known as "the younger school." One set of readers will maintain him to be a stark realist, taking their cue from *Diff'rent*, a drama in which New England seafaring folk speak their accustomed tongue and few details of portraiture are spared.

He is clearly an emotional playwright, others will say, urging the case of *The Straw*, where the love for each other of two consumptives is handled with true pathos. If *The Emperor Jones* be taken as the test, he is surely an impressionist and a fantastic. *Anna Christie* seems to show romantic possibilities, and *The Hairy Ape* bites as deep as any satire. He makes a wide appeal, not only for these reasons, but also because the austere heart of Boston warms to his Puritan spirit, while impatient and intolerant young Chicago responds to his vigour. It seems, nevertheless, that there is unity in the varied forms of his plays, and that a single motive lies behind

them. It may roughly be summed up in a word as the motive of illusion—the study of that infinite capacity of self-deception which has been the despair of the moralist, the joy of the cynic, and the stumbling-block of the reformer. In general, people who deceive themselves come off very poorly as imaginative characters, and the heinousness of their crime is forgotten in the enormity of its punishment. But the subject has tremendous possibilities, and O'Neill, who is humane to the point of occasional weakness, has discovered most of them.

In *Diff'rent* the illusion has a stern moral quality, for this is a play of an unsatisfied ideal. A girl, betrothed to the young captain of a whaler, refuses to marry him because he yielded to the charms of a savage beauty who swam out to his ship from a Southern island on his last voyage. Emma had thought him “diff’rent” from the rest, and she will live single rather than give up the illusion to accept a reality. A generation passes, and the captain comes and goes on voyages, calling between whiles to sit in Emma’s parlour and cultivate his own illusion, which is that time will close the breach between them. He is wrong, of course, for the ideal not only lives on with the obstinacy of ideals, but goes grey and faded. At last it becomes a fixed idea—scarcely an ideal at all, but a soured craving for an object of devotion. This is found in the captain’s nephew, a wretched offscouring of the Great War, in whose honour “Aunt Emma” refurnishes her parlour and dyes her hair, while

he plays jazz tunes on the gramophone she has installed and grinds cigarette-ends into her carpet. If she thinks him also "diff'rent" from other men it is not in the moral sense; so far as that is concerned (a fine touch) she is now tolerant. When this waster, threatened with being thrown out of doors for theft, proposes marriage to her, she falls into his arms. There is a terrible moment when Uncle Caleb, the captain, hears the news. "Thirty o' the best years o' my life flung for a yellow dog like him to feed on. God!" He talks of murder, then of bribing the "yellow dog" to let go his hold; but life is too deeply besmirched for either remedy, and he feels it must be ended. The younger man slinks back, wondering aloud whether his uncle meant what he said about bribery, and how high a figure he would go to. Aunt Emma listens dully and understands. She cries out under the blows, and they come faster. "Say, honest, Aunt Emmer, you didn't believe I was really struck on you. . . . This is what I get for foolin' around with an old hen like you that oughta been planted in the cemetery long ago! Paintin' your mush and dressin' like a kid!" She tears down the window curtains and the cheap finery before following Uncle Caleb, who has hanged himself in the barn. The memorable voice of tragedy speaks here, and it is heard through a dialect as rich in cadence and imagery as the speech of any English countryside.

The Emperor Jones has a simple, universal appeal.

Here the illusion is the power of fear, which grows from a hint and a tremor into an overmastering reality, and compels the spectator himself to become an actor in the drama. It is the old test of subjectivity ; unless we are Jones, the drama fails. But we are Jones, and we look through the eyes of this negro swashbuckler, who is hunted by the "bush niggers" he has ruled and despised. It seems that the subjectivity would be all the deeper if we had known Jones as emperor instead of assisting only at his downfall. The action plunges too abruptly into the forest of his fears. But if this is half a play, it is half a masterpiece, and it is felt to be wholly a work for stage performance. It is not difficult to believe that it gains enormously by being seen.

The Straw deals with a situation which is much simpler than the setting of the drama. A man and a woman fall in love, but the man does not know it ; his illusion is that friendship is there and nothing else. He goes away, returns to find her ill and suffering, and then discovers the reality of his feeling while he is simulating affection for her sake. The occasion has called up a subconscious but sincere passion. It is difficult to see how the author could have told his story without the setting of a sanatorium peopled by consumptives, but this elaboration of theme seems to hamper the action, and it is only in the last act that the fineness of the conception is brought out. The moment is worth waiting for.

In the first act of *Anna Christie* there are three or four moments that illustrate Eugene O'Neill's genius for presentation in dramatic form. An old barge-captain leans insecurely against the bar of a dockside saloon in New York, fumbling at a letter from the daughter he has not seen since she was a child. He is too drunk to read it properly; it will not come into focus even when held at arm's length; but it manages gradually to sober him down. Next door in the bar parlour sits the middle-aged drab with whom he has latterly been sharing his joys and sorrows. Somehow he has got to persuade her to "beat it," for Anna is coming to stay with him, and Anna means the turning over of a new leaf. The drab watches him and listens, and then agrees cheerfully to "beat it," giving a bad reason for her good deed. There are plenty of men in the world, she says, plenty of men, never worry. She packs the old man off to put his head under the pump and tidy up for Anna's homecoming. While he is away Anna arrives. She is just what her irregular stepmother might have been twenty years ago—a little painted slip of a woman, a bit of damaged goods, with a quick, hard smile and a voice echoing infinite disillusionment. Such a pair are not long in "sizing each other up." They take a glass or two together and exchange confidences—most of them from Anna's side. Unofficial stepmother listens and nods. It says much for her character that having sized Anna up thoroughly, she holds to her resolve to "beat it."

it." She is a good listener and not such a bad woman. While she is down at the barge, quietly packing up her traps for departure, Anna is sizing up her father—no great matter for a woman of her experience. His gnarled face shines with his great illusion about her innocence. He beams as he hesitates between coffee and sarsaparilla as a beverage for her. With a warning finger he offers a small glass of port, "just to celebrate" the great occasion. It is Anna's turn to listen. She learns all about the coal barge, the only place where she can hope to rest her weary head. She learns all about her fumbling, drunken, insignificant father—though she knew it already from a varied acquaintance of his kind. She, too, wants to "beat it" in his momentary absence from the parlour, but the small port comes back too soon, with his beaming face above it. Such accidents determine our fates. Anna's home-coming ends in the barge.

There is beauty in every line of these scenes. O'Neill handles ordinary happenings and relationships with profound originality, and as we scan the faces of his characters it seems that we have never before seen common flesh so suddenly transfigured by fineness of spirit. The first act of *Anna Christie* may be considered as a notable one-act play. However, we have to follow the career of Anna and her father. For me a passionate belief in the story ceases abruptly with the arrival on the barge (in a sea-fog) of the Irish lover. His importunity and her father's obstinacy are bound,

sooner or later, to wring from Anna the confession that will shatter them both. It is a truly dramatic conception, with an inevitable climax, and it is developed with power and subtlety. As the work of almost any other dramatist one would admire it tremendously. It is one of the best variants of the well-known play about the woman with a past, her family and her would-be husband. It out-Magdas Magda ; it knocks Paula Tanqueray (if one may be so vulgar) into a cocked hat ; it eclipses all the frail heroines of modern drama except Hedda Gabler (whose distinction it will always be that she had no past worth mentioning). But we hope for more than this from Eugene O'Neill. The well-known play about the woman with a past is not good enough for him ; it should be left to other pens. The unreality of it is manifest when the lover, flying into a rage, seizes a chair, and after swinging it above his head to such an angle that disaster seems inevitable, puts it down again and goes off to a corner with a muttered curse. The gesture is conventional and impotent in every sense. The emptiness of it arises from the character of the lover, who seems to be a product of O'Neill's reading and not of his observation. But Anna Christie remains the author's better self and the spirit of radiance in human character.

Arthur Richman

Ambush, although American in subject-matter, is a good play of the Manchester school—the school

of *Hindle Wakes* and *Jane Clegg*. It is of the sort sometimes described as "a slice of life," faithfully observed and altogether objective. We note therefore with a certain surprise that in the author's opinion "the audience sees the incidents of the play through the eyes of Walter Nichols" (this being the name of the principal male character). Are the realists also among the prophets? Do they also feel the need to spread their slice of life, as it were, with some condiment of imaginative quality?

It is as well that we should realise with whose eyes, besides our own, we see a play; the question is vital to the theatre. It is perhaps well that we should be introduced so unmistakably to our pair of spectacles. Walter Nichols is a middle-aged clerk who lives by principle in a world that lives by passion, instinct, greed, desire. He fails where others succeed, and is proud of it; he is right where others are wrong, and accepts the fact with a becoming modesty. He is a character who must be respected as well as liked. Morally speaking his eyes are those of our better self. He is also an entirely unimaginative man, a plodder through life, an excellent mentor, a dull companion. Imaginatively speaking his eyes are sadly myopic. When we look through them we see a play with all qualities except fantasy.

Yet there are some beautiful things in *Ambush*—the discoveries of the playwright who takes his courage in both hands and faces issues instead of

inventing situations. The scenes between Walter Nichols and his daughter are deeply felt. Hers is an empty nature, but she loves him. She also loves money and luxury—not fiercely and unattainably, as her mother loves the thought of them, but warmly and confidently, as a woman loves the lap-dog within reach. She gives herself to a lover who is poor, then she takes a second and third who are rich. She lies to her father, who believes her ; with her mother she is on terms of silent and sinister understanding. Here is manifestly a theme as tragic as that of *Lear* ; the action moves inevitably to the moment of the father's discovery of the truth. But from the nature of the characters there is an opposition not only of two wills and feelings, but of two worlds—the just man's world, where Fate lies in ambush for him, and the world of the compromising senses. Both of these worlds will live on, and death is no outcome of the tragedy. Instead, Walter Nichols with his upright nature is led by crooked ways through tolerance and forgiveness to toleration and even dependence on a lover's charity. He asks himself the question "Why ?" At the threshold of a foreign world it is the most tragic of questions.

In *Ambush*, as in the plays of O'Neill, a strong ethical sense that may justly be called Puritan makes itself felt. For young America moral indignation is the counterpart of the "social indignation" that gave substance and vitality to the realistic drama of Europe.

Charles Vildrac

M. Vildrac, author of *Le Paquebot Tenacity*, quotes Rabelais for his text: "Les destinées meuvent celui qui consent, tirent celui qui refuse." There is more of Panurge than Pantagruel in this dramatist's disposition, and his realism is a still small voice in the turmoil of the time, his action a reflex of the Great Convulsion. Two young Frenchmen who have been comrades in the trenches arrive at a seaport town whence they are to take ship for Canada. The campaign has given them an impulse to adventure; they seek wider fields than those of France. "Foutons le camp d'ici! Allons coloniser le nouveau monde!" (We perceive a foreshadowing of a sentimental motive, for this Great War chiefly inspired in men a craving for their own hearth.) One of them, sanguine and forceful, is the moving spirit in the affair; the other is reflective and cautious, a man born to play second fiddle. "Je vois clair dans les projets d'un autre, je sais s'ils sont bons ou mauvais. Mais je ne sais adopter aucun des miens." (We begin to respect M. Vildrac's observation.) Bastien, the sanguine partner, has been swept off his feet by the allurements of an emigration company, and he has carried the careful Ségard with him. "Et vous voyez aussi des lacs; mais des lacs qui sont grands comme la France."

The companions seek overnight quarters at a harbour café where a bibulous philosopher leans

on the counter and a pretty waitress serves the company. They are exalted by the consciousness of their epochal step. They are men who salute *la belle France* for the last time. To-morrow it will be ho ! for Canada and golden prairies. Decidedly this is an occasion for drinks all round. And then they learn that the s.s. *Tenacity* does not sail to-morrow. She is in port, certainly, but she does not sail. Something has gone wrong with her boiler. Oh yes, she will certainly sail one day, perhaps in a fortnight or so ; but not to-morrow. Such mischances have a ruffling effect. The steamer with “ *un nom fait pour nous, un nom de circonstance* ” has lost some of her glamour. An ironic symbolism enters. (We think of Chekhov.)

Would-be emigrants must shift for themselves. There is nothing for it but dock labour—the unloading of steel rails, for instance—to pass the time and pay for food and lodging at the café. It is the weaker Ségard who injures his arm at work and is mothered by the pretty Thérèse. It is he who first conceives a definite antipathy for golden prairies and a passion for home and beauty. Rebellion against the s.s. *Tenacity* surges within him, but he represses it from loyalty to his friend. Bastien knows best. It is too late now to change plans. It is too late now to pay more than a passing sentimental court to the girl who has moved him. Good Ségard, the deeper nature, behaves like a gentleman. It is Bastien, the shallower, who goes in and wins. He it is who sits up with Thérèse

until the small hours on the eve of the *Tenacity's* definite sailing ; he it is who proffers champagne and is finally admitted to her favour ; and he it is, next morning, who carries her off to the railway station while the house is still abed. Such a girl, thinks Bastien, is worth the American continent. He is sorry for old Ségard, but chiefly sorry that he should be deprived of his (Bastien's) company in the adventure on which they had set both their hearts. On the whole it is better not to meet him, but only to write him a note. There are things that some fellows (like old Ségard) will never understand. One of them is the adventurous spirit and another is the magic of a love-affair. “ *Le vraie liberté, c'est de changer brusquement de route, à son gré. Nous ferons n'importe quoi, ma jolie, mais nous serons ensemble.* ”

When at long last the sirens of the *Tenacity* announce her departure, it is Ségard who sails—Ségard who never wanted to emigrate, Ségard who loves the soil of France, Ségard who leaves his heart in the bluff embrace of Bastien. The irony is sharp ; the pathos of this character is not a little touching. We are repelled, however, by a certain rigidity in the conception. The outlines are too hard. The tragic note is wanting in the departure of the unwilling partner. We should be able to follow Bastien and Thérèse in our mind's eye ; we should see them opening a *café* together, maybe, and rearing a chubby family ; but we can barely imagine them arriving at the railway station

and taking tickets for the unknown. We do not know these characters well enough. It is not the author's realism that is at fault, but his determined logic. He wants always to make logical points, to weave logical patterns, to build up neat dramatic oppositions. When the resources of his three principal characters fail him he falls back upon his bibulous philosopher. “Voyez-vous, il y a les gens comme Ségard qui sont dans la vie comme des bouchons sur un fleuve. . . . Les autres, ce sont les girouettes, comme Bastien, bien fiers et assurés parce qu'ils ont un pivot. . . . Les autres, c'est encore moi, libre des hommes mais néanmoins l'esclave des vents et du fleuve ; tantôt vieille girouette et tantôt vieux bouchon. Un vieux bouchon toujours attiré—misère !—vers les goulets des bouteilles. . . .” This sage belongs properly to the theatre of Dumas and Sardou ; but how reluctantly young France lays him on the shelf !

COMEDIANS

COMEDIANS

Fernand Crommelynck

IT is the fashion to say of plays like *Le Cocu Magnifique* that they are vastly entertaining, but their subject will not bear analysis in the cold light of the English language. We must leave them, it is urged, to our Gallic cousins, who have so graceful a gift for the handling of impropriety. It would be a crime to translate such scandalous persiflage into terms of reason ; and so forth and so forth. Now this is the greatest nonsense that ever served to fill ten lines of a newspaper column. If a work of art has any meaning, that meaning can be decently expressed and universally understood. The English language is as good as the French language, and cuckold is as good a word as its equivalent, and *The Magnanimous Cuckold* is as good a title as any comedy can hope to bear. Let us, therefore, look at M. Crommelynck's play with the unprejudiced eyes proper to a nation that possesses not only the finest but the coarsest dramatic literature in the world. It may reasonably be conjectured that however scandalous the plot and however shocking the dialogue, they will not compare with those of the old English plays revived by the Phœnix Society.

But first let us look into the question of the drama of sex in general.

It is a question concerning which the French are obstinately conservative. With them savagery and the social equality of the sexes go hand in hand. With them pornography and high comedy hob-nob together, and the grossest cynicism is matched by the most dishevelled sentiment. The wittiest scenes of contemporary French comedy have not a word in them that might not have been written by Henry Becque in 1880, or for that matter by Molière in 1650, while the sentimental scenes appear to have been lifted bodily from the stage of the younger Dumas. Where men and women are concerned this drama changes as little as do the young ladies of *La Vie Parisienne* with their roseate insipidity and flagrant disarray.

The tradition is in part excellent and in part despicable ; but it must be exceedingly hard for a French author to write a comedy of marriage when he reflects that all the dramatists of his native theatre have said the same thing about the subject. If there be any advantage of originality, it lies with the older and not with the younger school. Some of the youngest writers, like MM. Duhamel and Vildrac, refuse to mount the treadmill of convention. They seek for subjects in which, if the sexual interest be not entirely eliminated, it plays at least a secondary part. This is an evasion that carries with it a certain conscious weakness. On the other hand, M. Crommelynck

accepts the old tradition and proceeds boldly to enlarge its scope. *Le Cocu Magnifique* and *Les Amants Puérils*—these are the chosen titles of an author who takes the comedy of sex at its face value and yet laughs heartily at the imposture. He is no realist. By placing the scene of his action “des nos jours en Flandre” he achieves a singular detachment. We can believe anything of these Flemings, whose babes are surely as rosy as Rubens cherubs and whose skies luminous as the backgrounds of “Velvet” Brueghel. The inexhaustible generative force of Nature is in this people. They inhale exuberance from their flax-fields and cruelty from their cattle. When Bruno, the cuckold, points out the beauties of his wife’s form, he falls naturally into a lyrical and Rabelaisian profusion :—

Et c'est une ligne, celle-ci, une seule ligne ! Et il y en a mille comme elle, cent mille, que dis-je ? mille milliards de lignes selon que je tourne autour de ce modèle unique, chacune aussi parfaite, et qui toutes, en faisceaux réunies, festonnées, volutées, onduleuses, droites ou contournées, grasses ou déliées, jaillissantes ou retombantes, vibrantes ou reposées, longues ou ramassées, roulées, ondées, frisées, nouées, distendues, dévidées, fouettantes ou pleuvantes, cinglantes ou pleureuses, ou caressantes, ou tremblées, ou vaguélées, en spire, en hélice, en torsade, l'une après l'autre ou ensemble, ces lignes-la n'ont qu' une trajectoire, une seule, qui porte l'amour dans mon cœur !

This is no ordinary language ; but Bruno is no ordinary man. He is a dweller in a windmill. He is composer-in-chief of love-letters to an illiterate peasantry, who pay him twenty *sous*

apiece for his effusions. He is adviser-in-chief to the mayor in delicate questions of public policy. He is the chief character of the countryside ; his doings are the talk of every fair. He is a well of jocundity, a fountain of high spirits, a volcano of human nature in active eruption. When such a man doubts the honour of his wife the affair is portentous. The rankling uncertainty in which other husbands live is intolerable to him. He must have knowledge at whatever cost :

BRUNO : *J'ai le remède à ce doute, le remède absolu, immédiat, la panacée universelle : pour ne plus douter de ta fidélité, que je sois certain de ton infidélité ! . . . Tu me tromperas donc aujourd' hui, sous mon toit. . . . Un mari doit être cocu, inévitablement, et je veux l'être. Il n'y a pas de remission. Le ridicule et la souffrance naissent de l'ignorance et du doute. Je serai instruit de mon infortune et je le serai le premier. Pas de compromis, je serai cocu ce jour-même ou je serai mort. Les cornes ou la corde !*

He throws his wife into the arms of his friend Pétrus, and is instantly consumed with jealousy. He loads a gun to shoot the pair of them ; his frenzied shouts bring the mayor to the house at the head of a throng of villagers. He declares himself cuckolded and receives the tactful condolences of the civic power. But when his wife and friend reappear, the instincts of the immemorial husband are too much for him. His cry is “ Ah ! ah ! la bonne farce ! Ils veulent m'en faire accroire ! ” They are trying to frighten him, he declares ; he'll not believe a word of it. The

unhappy Stella is reduced to convincing him not only with Pétrus, but with Tom, Dick and Harry. She is pursued by joyous hordes of swains, she is execrated by all good wives and maids. Still Bruno will not believe; still he looks for one unknown lover among the men who surround her. He disguises himself and comes to her as a serenader, and she, who no longer loves him, is about to yield when the house is raided by indignant matrons seeking their missing menfolk. Stella is ducked in the river, and she returns clad in the cloak of the herdsman who is the most vigorous of her suitors. The herdsman has sworn to share her with nobody, not even with her husband. She boxes his ears, and Bruno, who is listening, observes "C'est lui, c'est donc lui!" The blows are proof for him that this is the unknown lover. But when Stella begs the herdsman to assure her that she will be able to be faithful to him, Bruno cries, "Ah, non, non, pas si sot! C'est encore un de ses tours! Tu ne m'y prendras plus!" His magnanimity is sustained to the end.

Imagine these personages transferred to the drawing-room, and you have one of the hundred polite and weary comedies of sex—such a comedy as Capus or Donnay or François de Curel might have written. M. Crommelynck, who abandons the plane of realism and seeks for the ludicrous essentials of his situation, escapes at the same time from the urbanity and the lassitude of these contemporaries. His *reductio ad absurdum* of the

sexual motive imparts a new vigour to the theme. His comedy is cruel and grandiloquent, but it is elemental. The sap of nature runs in this tree that leans against the wind of Flanders and casts a fantastic shadow on the plain.

Georges Duhamel

M. Duhamel has an eye for a situation, like the man who first thought of a bull in a china shop. He has also a talent for extravagance. He insists that every article, from the piece of Dresden ware to the humblest of bedroom crockery, shall be incontinently and magnificently smashed. He imagines utensils and ornaments momentarily impaled on the horns of destruction, held aloft, toppled, trampled, pulverised. *L'Œuvre des Athlètes* may well bewilder the spectator should he fail to understand that this is the extravagant work of a serious playwright and not the serious work of a trifler. M. Duhamel has earned the right to play with the theatre. His tale must be considered as intellectual farce—no less raucous and tumultuous for having, somewhere, an idea at the back of it.

The bull is Remy Belœuf, editor of *Brain, Thought and Matter*, and the china shop, to be exact, is a pharmacy. Belœuf is a prince of quack philosophers and humbugs ; the chemist (to whom he is distantly related) is as credulous a creature as ever swallowed a pill. Belœuf imposes himself with little trouble upon the chemist's family in the back parlour. They laugh at him at first (his

resemblance to a cat, of all animals, being the family joke), but they are soon at his feet. The shop-soiled little chemist turns philosopher; the matronly chemist's wife turns moralist; both of the chemist's daughters discover their affinity in their brilliant visitor, and one risks her virtue to secure him while the other adores him beautifully from afar. The egregious Belœuf is in clover, if we may mix the metaphors still further. He triumphs over his rivals in the field of quackery. The enemy or anti-Belœuf faction consists only of the chemist's son and his stout assistant, who conspire against him with an air of desperate men. The assistant, honest fellow, boxes the impostor's ears in a fit of rage, and is dismissed. Belœuf is found out in a project of free love, and hopes for marriage and a dowry. It is a sacrifice indeed for such a man, almost amounting to betrayal of the readers of *Brain, Thought and Matter*; but (with a sigh) he will make it. And the chemist's son and the stout assistant run away in impotent fury to found a league of Patagonians, or inhabitants of some land where Belœufs are unknown. Their incursions animate the wedding-feast, but they make no lasting impression upon the majesty of Belœuf, who sits enthroned among the *bourgeois*, quaffing their tribute of flattery.

This is the kind of play that irritates where it does not vastly amuse. It is (in the original) an immensely vigorous piece of work, a farce of character and observation. M. Duhamel's more serious muse

is enshrined in the older play of *La Lumière*, where he proves himself a sensitive and not unworthy disciple of Claudel.

Paul Géraldy

The author of *Les Noces d'Argent* turns his back upon the fashionable subject of adultery, but cannot bring himself entirely to abandon the conventions of the well-made play. He will have none of the bearded husbands who burst into drawing-rooms through folding doors, and wring the truth of a confession from their dishevelled wives, and then break down and sob like children at their feet ; but in principle he is not averse from a crashing climax, and in practice he is not above the art of moulding a scene into a situation. Thus his simple comedy of character becomes invested with all the pomp and circumstance proper to the modern stage of the Comédie Française. His middle-class family, which belongs naturally to some quiet and cultivated suburb, appears as if ennobled by association with the theatre. It develops the courtly graces of an aristocracy. We think of Passy transferred to the Faubourg St. Honoré, or of Hampstead elevated to Belgrave Square. The members of the family live up to their surroundings. One and all of them have the dignity that is essentially of the theatre—the smooth and rounded features of a personality from which realistic wrinkles have been removed, the easy flow of philosophy and epigram, the air of being indispensable functionaries at some im-

portant rite. At times we can scarcely see the personages for the types, heavy father and kindly mother, *ingénue* and *jeune premier*, who bulk so largely on the stage. And yet, surprisingly enough, *Les Noces d'Argent* remains a comedy of character. It may have been an excellent comedy until M. Géraldy decided for the Comédie Française and a play of importance. It is still admirable by comparison with the dramas of the eternal triangle to which most of the mechanical playwrights devote their gifts.

A breathless wedding-day introduces us to the Hamelin family. The daughter, Suzanne, a calculating minx, is being married to a young man of whom nothing is known save that he has "de bons certificats." A suitable match—but it is not this pair whose fortunes we shall follow. The interest lies in those who do not take train for Italy, but remain to wave from the doorstep as the taxi departs. M. Hamelin, for instance, whose sentimental dream it has been to take his daughter to Italy; and his son Max, aged twenty, who has profited by the commotion of the wedding to obtain some few liberties, but still chafes under domestic restraint; and Mme. Hamelin, who dotes upon her boy after the fashion of indulgent but unwise mothers; and her friend Marraine, who understands Max and becomes his first mistress. The inevitable "situation" arises when Marraine calls upon Mme. Hamelin to talk of Max and his affairs, and finds on the table a letter addressed

to him in a strange feminine hand. The most anxious of mothers will not venture to open this letter, but for a jealous mistress the thing is child's play. In the action and the ensuing storm Mme. Hamelin reads the truth of the relation between her friend and her boy. Situation upon situation ; reproach and invective ; humiliation and grief. Marraine is driven from the house. M. Hamelin, amazed but philosophical, tries to protect his precocious offspring from a mother's outraged fury. "Je vais lui dire ma révolte, mon indignation," declares Mme. Hamelin. In such a case a father can only withdraw tactfully from the scene. But Mme. Hamelin herself thinks better of the project, and resolves to obtain her son's confidence. "Est-ce que c'est impossible," she asks him, "que mon enfant m'ouvre son cœur, simplement, tout simplement ? Oh ! je sais bien qu'il y a des mères qui bondiraient ! Mais moi, Max, franchement, moi !" Max is touched ; he yields. He tells naïvely the somewhat sordid tale of Marraine's successor, the sender of the fatal letter. This charmer, it appears, needs money ; and he is short of money. Here Mme. Hamelin's acting breaks down ; she is unable to conceal her revulsion. The scene ends abruptly, with mother and son irrevocably parted. Suzanne returns from her honeymoon, but offers little field for the devotion of her parents. Her sole idea is to exploit them shamelessly, down to the borrowing of their furniture and their domestics. M. Hamelin dies, Max becomes a conscript, Suzanne develops

social ambitions. Mme. Hamelin's maternal rashness is rewarded by a general indifference. The evening of her silver wedding finds her arranging her daughter's dinner-table and decreeing the order in which the wines shall be served ; but she withdraws before the beginning of a feast at which she would be inevitably the skeleton.

M. Géraldy's comedy has many admirable qualities, not the least of which is a blend of sensibility with detachment. It breaks away from that convention of the children's inevitable wisdom and the parents' inevitable stupidity which has produced so many tedious dramas of family life. Here the parents are the deeper natures who fail to awaken response. If the effect is unsatisfactory, that is because the conventions of the well-made play have too firm a hold upon the author. "Pris ?" exclaims Marraine, "Quoi ! Pris ? Qu'est-ce que j'ai pris ? J'ai donné, oui, donné, ma raison, mon orgueil, et mon passé irreprochable, à un petit miserable qui allait traîner tout dans le ruisseau, qui courait après des filles. . . ." Here speaks the authentic voice of the boulevards. "Mon passé irreprochable !" MM. Bataille or Bernstein could have done no worse.

Sacha Guitry

Let those who will commend the lighter pieces of M. Sacha Guitry—those *soufflés* of the theatre, occasions for delightful acting. Let those who will admire the false quantities of *Deburau* or the

portentous dignity of *Pasteur*. For my part I would gladly exchange them all for an hour of *Jacqueline*, that tragic comedy of ill-nature that contains everything the dramatist has to give. An ill-natured man is married to the woman who gives her name to the play, but never appears in it. She fears and hates this husband who never smiles, and she consoles herself elsewhere with the ease that Frenchwomen always exhibit in plays, and especially in the plays of M. Sacha Guitry. The *liaison* on which she embarks is one of these tiresome five o'clock affairs that may, if unduly prolonged, delay the dinner-hour. It delays the dinner-hour on the particular evening when the play opens, and we know that ill-natured men cannot abide being kept waiting for their meals. Up and down the room stumps the surly husband, venting his humours on the guest of the evening, an unsuccessful painter who, like himself, is middle-aged. Why is the painter unsuccessful ? Does he ever expect to succeed ? Extraordinary that people take up such professions ! And so forth. Then comes the news that Madame will not dine this evening, for she has been shot dead by her lover's wife. The surly husband sustains the shock with egotistical philosophy. He is infinitely obliged to the lady, he says, for having got herself killed ; for he would certainly have had to kill her himself sooner or later. What a fool she had thought him, and how she and her worthless pack of relations had sponged on him ! But he had seen through her all the while—oh yes ! And

now he is well rid of her ! This man is abominable, protests the listener.

The ill-natured man goes off to the South to nurse his grievances alone, and there falls in with a girl who is hoping one day to amass twenty thousand francs in order to start a dressmaking shop. He does not please her (what woman would he please ?), but she puts up with him at first, her thoughts being firmly fixed on the twenty thousand francs. It is arranged that they shall travel together, but there is something in the ill-natured man's way of taking his morning coffee that makes the girl think twice about it. She humours him obligingly, but his black cloud of surliness rolls up and threatens to blot out her smile. After all, she reflects, there is no need to stay ; this is a free country. Wives who dislike their husbands at breakfast-time may be obliged to put up with them, but *amies* can depart when they choose. She can pack her bag this moment—and she does. Back comes the ill-natured man, in time to catch her. Where is she going ? Oh, nowhere in particular ; just going. It is all over, then ? Yes, it is all over. Why ? The girl hesitates, with native good manners. She would rather not say. He presses her, then bullies her, then gives her money. Will she tell him the whole truth ? Yes, at last she will. She is leaving him because he is a brute and a savage—because a wave of repulsion for him has overwhelmed her. He lets her go, and for the first time he sees himself as others see

him. He sobs : “ Ah, pauvre, pauvre Jacqueline ! ” The words are needless ; they are banal ; but they are of the essence of M. Guitry’s muse.

The ill-natured man comes back to Paris and devotes himself to the adoration of his wife’s memory. Everything in the house must be just as she left it. The painter, who was executing a pastel of her at the time of her death, is invited to dinner, bringing the work with him. An uninvited and unexpected guest this same evening is the murderer of Jacqueline, who comes ostensibly to thank her victim’s husband for his endeavours to obtain her acquittal. Really she has come to flatter him (as she supposes) by telling him how splendidly he has behaved throughout the affair, and how unworthy Jacqueline was of such a man. It is a masterly stroke of technique that makes her use the same language about the dead woman that the husband himself used two acts earlier ; whilst now his fingers twitch at the sound of it, and the listener feels the growth of a pent-up passion that must lead to a tremendous outburst. It is a masterly though infamous stroke that makes this cat-like, purring woman suggest her own willingness to step into the other’s shoes. Decidedly she deserves to be strangled, if any woman ever deserved it. And strangled she is—caught suddenly by the throat, held at arm’s length, crushed out of being by the passionate revulsion of this monster of surliness. The quality of *Jacqueline* is its unbeautiful logic.

A. A. Milne

The discerning listener to *The Dover Road* will feel that he has not only travelled the main highway, but sauntered in every lane that turns out of it. They are green and pleasant English lanes, and boyish and innocent adventures are to be found in them. Not a kiss is snatched from a milkmaid at a turning, not an indiscreet splinter catches her skirt at a stile ; but there is splendid birds'-nesting, and the ponds are full of tadpoles, and the chestnuts are in full flower (though, fortunately, not yet bearing fruit). Mr. Milne knows all about those lanes and saunters with you, as it seems, arm-in-arm, making observations not exactly about human nature, but about human oddities. His excellent jokes are like school-magazine jokes raised to the *nth* magnitude. You suspect him of having invented the classic tale of Jones minor, who found in the course of his ablutions a sweater he has lost for several months. He has a keen sense of the unexpected and a high appreciation of the preposterous ; and while he is practising a genius for the presentation of these absurdities, you get farther and farther down the lane and away from the turnpike road. The side-issues are the things that amuse Mr. Milne and therefore amuse you. Sometimes you suspect that he feels safer in the lanes than on the high road, and that the pace of the stroll is not quite free from calculation. But how companionable is the humour, how

spirited the invention, and how amiable the dialogue !

Among the obvious fruits of divagation are a husband visibly breakfasting and shaving for twenty minutes by the clock ; a too-affectionate wife reading Gibbon aloud ; and the entire character of the rich man who intercepts would-be runaway couples and gives them time, in his comfortable mansion, to think better of their immoral project. Although you would expect him to have acquired some knowledge of the world, this enterprising host lets fall no remark inappropriate to a birds'-nesting expedition. He is cynical, certainly, but how sweetly, how innocently cynical ! The mentality of a really nice Oxford tutor hangs about him in spite of the Bohemian velvet jacket, the flowing tie, and the dashing eyeglass. Let us not quarrel with him for that ; it is good to be so innocent. But let us not pretend, except for fun, that the gentleman ever kept the reformatory for eloping couples. He is only a green lane in which the author saunters —with an air. Such plays are easily seen and easily forgotten.

The Truth about Blayds was made (in the beginning) of more memorable stuff. It was an essay in serious comedy as opposed to pipe-and-slipper humour or bobbed-hair-and-jumper sentiment. It had foundations of character. Old Oliver Blayds, that venerable relic of the Victorian era, lived in every line of his portrait. We saw him from various angles and in various lights. We sympathised with

his grandchildren who found so great a grandfather hard to live up to. We bent the knee of homage with the deputation of younger writers who saluted the poet's ninetieth birthday. We felt, with his fussy and pompous little son-in-law, that nothing short of an Abbey funeral would ultimately meet the case. We approved the sacrifice of the daughter who had given up her prospects of love and marriage to devote herself to the old man's care. And then Blayds died. He whispered on his death-bed the staggering truth that he was a charlatan. He had built up his reputation on another poet's treasure of manuscript. The fortune he had made in royalties was stolen property. All this venerable legend that had clung about him was naught, from his high-minded refusal of a peerage to his sturdy damning of his creaky boots during a royal interview at Osborne.

Then the play should have begun. There were but two possible solutions. One was to make the confession public and surrender Blayds's fortune ; the other to hush the matter up and pretend that the old man was suffering from delusions. The first was of dubious dramatic effect ; the second promised success to a remorseless satirist. Mr. Milne, painfully aware of the dilemma, confided himself to the tender mercies of the daughter who had been old Blayds's ministering angel and was now his sole executrix. The drama became, most disastrously, hers. Alas, we were not interested in this lady and her unborn children, but in old

Blayds. His ghostly and admirable figure returned again and again to remind us that the dramatist had taken himself too seriously and his art not seriously enough.

The comedy of *Success* was as ambitious in conception and as slight in achievement. Here Mr. Milne chose one of the classical dramatic plots, that of a sleeping memory awakened. A successful politician, deeply committed to the claims of position and family, goes down into the country to make a momentous speech. He encounters a well-remembered hostess. He sleeps in a well-remembered room and dreams of boyhood and romance. He dreams also of portentous butlers and fish-like private secretaries and flunkeys bearing Chancellor's robes who keep thrusting themselves between him and his beloved. In the morning he finds her in the garden. He thrusts aside all the phantom interlopers—his scheming family, her drunken husband, his rosy success, her faded failure—and offers her what is left of his life. She accepts, but gives him a week to think it over. He comes to town transfigured by his affection for this woman. He sends in his resignation to the Prime Minister, and the move is thought to be a master-stroke of political strategy. He is rewarded with the Chancellorship of the Exchequer. And success “closes in on him.” And that is all.

A comedy of fine moments. Mr. Milne's emotional scenes are sincere and vivid while they last. The trouble is that he neither prepares them

nor faces their consequences. In his career as an author he has not yet wrecked a happy home, or, for that matter, an unhappy one. We are touched, but we vaguely resent being touched in vain. These questions of love and marriage and fidelity are more significant than they appear when they are viewed through the wrong end of the opera-glasses in a really nice Milne comedy.

EXPRESSIONISTS

EXPRESSIONISTS

Leonid Andreev

ANDREEV'S "theatre of the soul" is as young as expressionist drama and as old as the mediæval mystery plays. This dramatist brings us no new technique, but he makes fresh observations and takes fresh bearings. Thoughts of progress are foreign to him, but he advances step by step into the recesses of human personality. Without faith, but also without scepticism, without passion but also without indifference, he sets himself to examine the nature and uses of an instrument that presents increasing wonders to his mind. With some authors three personages (say husband, wife and lover) are all that are needed for the composition of a play. With others two will suffice ; the interest of the dialogue is inexhaustible. But with Andreev we feel that if one man alone were left on the earth, or even if but one man had ever been created, he would still find in him the subject of a drama. In effect all his plays concern the mind of a single man. The other personages are not even minor or neutral characters. They are themselves offshoots of the single tree of personality. They are themselves embodiments of the doubts and

fears that issue from the house of Man, and halt, and flee for refuge to their native corridors. They are types of the beauties who walk in the garden of Man and the lusts that lie in wait for him. They are images of friendships and enmities, vices and virtues, impulses and aspirations, all of them originating in some chamber, however remote, of the dwelling that is the middle of the universe. Man himself may take his walks abroad, a figure of equal stature with these children of his mind, and laugh and talk with them ; or he may be an unseen character in his own drama, like the queen in the hive, so that we measure his importance only by the commotion that surrounds him. He remains the solitary figure of the stage.

The writers of the old morality plays, such as *Everyman*, gave him a place of a similar mystical importance ; but their theatre had another principal character, a thunderous voice of the Almighty or a gentle apparition of the Virgin, that actually determined the outcome of the drama. For these writers *Everyman* was a personage indeed, but he was a dignitary rather than a despot, a legate of the heavenly power subject to sudden and awful interventions from the skies. Andreev, on the other hand, admits no theocracy to his theatre. The soul of man suffices him. He even assumes that with the passing of the centuries this soul grows more and more self-supporting in its psychological nature, while the outward world of dramatic happenings gradually loses its importance. He

compares the older and conventional drama with the life of Benvenuto Cellini, who passed day after day in an astonishing imbroglio of escapes and surprises, and the newer drama with the life of Friedrich Nietzsche, who created his prodigious figure of Zarathustra out of the silence of the study. He declares that the modern theatre, while it is conscious of the emptiness of outward intrigue, has as yet nothing to put in its place. It has discarded the tin sword of Cellini, but it stands speechless in the presence of such a psychological drama as that which rent Nietzsche's spirit. We are conscious of a certain truth in these comparisons, and also of a certain hint of megalomania. We ask ourselves whether the actual part played by intellect in the theatre of the soul may not be overrated. We grant that the theatre of the tin sword has nothing more to give us, but contend that the multi-personal theatre of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Chekhov has much to give. We dispute the assumption that the theatre of to-morrow will be a lonely theatre where solitary men wrestle terribly with their fears and their passions. We remember the thunderous voice that spoke to Everyman, and consider what a monster of egoism this man would have been had his soul been self-sufficient. Greed and sloth and gluttony, good deeds and friendship and courtesy—how wearisome their battle for the soul of a single psychological mortal! In brief, we reflect that the theatre was made for man and not man for the

theatre. Andreev must stand on his own merits as a dramatist. We shall not admit his claim to have discovered a new fundamental of dramatic art, or a theatre where none but intellectual conflicts rage in the quiet of the lonely mind ; for that way madness lies. In the theatre of the soul sanity must be supreme.

Andreev invites us further to consider whether action, in the accepted sense of visible movement and achievement, is necessary to the theatre. This is the question that agitated Constantine in Chekhov's *The Seagull* ; it was the question also that manifestly exercised the mind of the earlier Maeterlinck. The speculative thinker or the student of social psychology may find the question in itself arresting. Can audiences who have passed their own lives in visible movement and achievement sympathise with characters whose entire life is withdrawn to a sanctuary of intellectual or spiritual interest ? It would appear that symbols of action at least must be offered to the spectator ; and thus we should reach an inverted world where symbolism stands for the unperformed action instead of (as usual) for the unexpressed thought. For us, however, who are concerned with the æsthetics of the theatre, the only satisfying answer can be found in accomplishment. Has the modern theatre, in fact, produced actionless plays ? and if so, are they of any value ? We think of Maeterlinck's *Intérieur* and of the drama within a drama of *The Seagull*. Perhaps we think also of Andreev, for

his especial reputation is that of an actionless dramatist. He has withdrawn, it is said, into the innermost recesses of the soul, leaving Chekhov still standing on the threshold and fumbling at the latch. He is the symbolist of the spiritual crisis, just as Chekhov was its realist. He is the interpreter in the Babel of modern drama.

When, however, we examine his plays more closely, it is their action that strikes the spectator—an action not only mental but outward and visible. It is true that their character changes with the lapse of years, and his theories of psychological movement culminate in a drama named *Thought* (1914); but Andreev, like Chekhov, is a story-teller, and his sense of narrative is perhaps sounder than his metaphysics. The play called in English *The Black Maskers* (1908) is founded on a mediæval legend, and although it embodies the whole philosophy of the “theatre of the soul,” the outward semblance of dramatic form is always preserved. Duke Lorenzo of Spadaro gives a masquerade in his castle, which is lighted within and without. The castle, says Andreev, is the soul, and the lord of the castle is man. The guests and even the musicians are to be masked, but when the first of them appear their aspect troubles the host. These are ordinary people in strange guises, but they are transformed by his imagination into forebodings. After them come black masks unknown either to the Duke or his guests, creatures “like living fragments of darkness,” who have been drawn to

the castle by the illumination of the countryside. The black masks, says Andreev, are the mysterious powers whose field of action is the soul of man. There is a duality in the dramatic movement, for the mummery of the painted masks reveals a tragedy in Duke Lorenzo's outward life, while the influx of the black masks, extinguishing the light, clouds his mind. Two Lorenzos take shape, the one the happy host and husband who has bidden his friends to his castle, the other a monster in his own likeness, the serpent living in his heart. They fight in a tower, and Lorenzo kills his double. Madness overtakes him. He sees in imagination the coffin in which the false Lorenzo lies in state. He sees masks on the faces of his friends, who wear none. He calls on the devil for aid ; but when his mad jester fires the castle and he perishes, the black masks are seen vainly trying to re-enter and being driven back by the flames. "This truth," he cries, "is known to all people in the world : Lorenzo, Duke of Spadaro, has no serpent in his heart !"

The Life of Man (1906) represents in dramatic shape another conception of Russian folklore. Life is imagined as an ascent from youth to middle age, from poverty to wealth, and as a descent to old age and death. The tragedy of self-centred Man is pictured. "Limited in vision, he will not see the step to which his unsure foot is already raising him. Limited in knowledge, he will never know what the coming day or hour or moment is bringing

to him. And in his blind ignorance, worn by apprehension, harassed by hopes and fears, he will complete submissively the iron round of destiny." This is the forecast of the Being in Grey, who symbolises fate and accompanies Man throughout his journey. The moment of Man's greatest prosperity, when he enters his ballroom with his wife leaning on his arm, is a climax of emptiness. Behind him stand the days when he dreamed of greatness of mind, before him stand the pitiless years of misfortune and sickness. Around him are grouped the friends and enemies of Man, murmuring or sneering. The band plays, but the music has no meaning. There is even an incoherence as of missing notes. The host and the guests wear the same rigid mask of self-satisfaction. The life of the intelligence is wanting ; no bond has been established between personal needs and the reason that is called natural law. So Man and his nameless companions mount their flight of steps mechanically to reach fame and fortune, and descend again mechanically to the grave.

He Who Gets Slapped (1918) has been performed in America, and has even made a single fleeting appearance on the English stage. In this play Man (or He) breaks away from the circle of fate and seeks oblivion. He has sought to fulfil his destiny in books and thought, he has sought to become a god ; but since the individual can never escape from the grouping of the mass, he resolves to efface himself in the obscurity of the life and

desires of these others. He offers himself as a clown in a circus, where his rôle is to be slapped for the amusement of the public. The kernel of the play lies not in his relation to his fellow-performers (which forms the outward action) but in the laughter of the spectators who are never seen. They laugh unwittingly at themselves—at their own minds and their own culture, but most of all at the failure of which they are sublimely unconscious.

Shall this be called actionless drama? It is rather the drama of a universal gesture, the movement of a nameless throng. This movement links Andreev with the expressionists who have been so vehemently abused and so little understood. He is a voice speaking for a multitude. We should disregard the flow of logic and listen for the cadence of sincerity. We should disregard the frenzy that is called Russian pessimism and look for the sanity that underlies it. Else, in the midst of a bewildered Europe, we shall never see the wood for the trees.

Karel Capek

The strength of Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* lies even more in its hour than in its subject. The mechanical figures made by men in their own image are bound sooner or later to usurp world-dominion and exterminate their masters. We foresee the development of the "Robots" from industrious automata into creatures with whims and passions, moods

and frenzies, a heart and a soul. We even foresee dimly the day when the last surviving man, a white-bearded scientist, will seek in his laboratory the lost formula for manufacturing inhabitants of this earth. If there be no more men, let there at least be Robots.

A dead planet cries for life. One step farther and we foresee the Adam and Eve of the Robot family in the earliest stage of courtship, ready to repeople the earth with a race that shall be no longer mechanical, but human and humane. In their garden lurks as yet no serpent. There is little originality in the idea. You may piece it together, bit by bit, from all the classical and modern tales of men who made beings like themselves, or even from Roger Bacon's brazen head that spoke, or Vaucanson's automatic duck that set the eighteenth century agog with its quacking. The motive is always recurring in literature, like the motive of the heavenly visitor who is taken for a man. The motive of racial death and rebirth recurs as often. The last man in a plague-stricken world, driven to the woods by hordes of wild creatures that invade his empty cities, lies on a bough and watches eagerly the anthropoid apes who fumble with bits of wood and stone. This year perhaps they will carve a weapon ; next year maybe a tool ; next decade a dwelling ; and in centuries or ages a cathedral. The watcher will die, but the race will go on. It is a subject for "fantastic melodrama," as this play is well called.

Fortunately, there is something more in it than the sensational power of the old tale. That something is Capek's instinct for feeling the response of his audience at every given moment—an instinct sincere but unerring. The play is not a piece of dramatic literature; it is scarcely even a deep or thoughtful work. It is a piece of brilliant journalism of the stage, a work of temperamental power that "carries," as actors say, because the author believes in it, and believes in his audience, and is interested in their reaction to what he has to say. It may be said that every successful playwright does as much. Certainly it is true that without faith nothing is possible. Every writer must believe in his work, and even a Lyceum melodrama cannot be written with the tongue in the cheek. But Capek goes farther than belief. He has a natural understanding of crowds and crowd psychology. Europe of to-day is his stage and the world his audience, not because we feel his plays to be immortal, but because we feel them to be inevitable. They are as inevitable as the leading article on the morrow of the Budget—good journalism, well phrased, well presented, and, above all, well timed. They have more to do with passing events than with enduring symbols.

Day-to-day work is stamped with a certain fleeting character that cannot be disguised. So it is with the work of Karel Capek, and with *R.U.R.* in particular.

But wise men have observed that while books

have their scores or hundreds of readers, newspapers have their hundreds of thousands. Why waste the sweetness of ideas on the desert air of literature, they argue, when they might bloom joyously in the suburban garden where Smith and Brown, home from the office, are sucking their pipes and watering their sweet peas? It is to this great newspaper-reading audience that Capek speaks. The sensations of his play are epic, magnificent. What headlines they would make! What headlines, in fact, they do make! "Rossum's Universal Robots—Men Manufactured—Too Old at Twenty—Seekers after Souls—the Fight for the Formula—Revolt of the Robots—Nature set at Naught." And how absorbing, too, are the questions that the author raises! Are Robots right or wrong? Is Progress right or wrong? Should Robots fight for men, or only work for them? Should Robots vote? Should Robots have a soul? In every question there is matter for an autumn newspaper correspondence, if not for an election address. "Robots or No Robots—Progress or No Progress?" The cries positively haunt the listener. The question of the desirability of progress is an interesting one, if only Mr. Capek would not obscure the issue with his confounded dramatic sense. But of course we ought to be grateful for the quality. His dramatic sense is the life-blood of *R.U.R.* For my part the author may keep his questions and the answers to them, if he only shows us towering factories built by Robots,

swung on cranes, and Robots looming up gigantic at the window against a flaming sky, and Robots chanting their cry for a posterity as they advance in regular formation and rhythmic gestures. These dramatic pictures have a certain style and importance.

For the rest of his dramatic effect, Capek borrows freely from his audience. His Robots not only work in factories and add up figures in counting-houses, but they are hired by governments for armies, and they kill each other and mankind with a cool precision quite devoid of ill-feeling. (For Robots read chemists, and we have the probable forecast of the next war.) They likewise have a tendency to band themselves together. "It was a mistake to make them international," says one of their inventors. "We must have national Robots; then they will speak a different language and really hate each other." A bitter saying. It is certain that our sympathy for the Robots increases as the play proceeds, if only because they are more interesting than the human beings who claim to have made them. Eventually we begin to wonder whether we ourselves may not be Robots—a theatre full of Robots waiting for an awakening. Yes, the author throws out his hints very skilfully. The childlessness that comes upon the world with the universal employment of Robots as labourers; the impression of hacking, soulless armies overrunning a countryside; the moral degeneration of the scientist who has made too

great a discovery ; these are worth thinking over. When you have thought them over, you find there is no more in them than in yesterday's or to-morrow's newspaper head-line ; but they have interested you all the same. In that sense *R.U.R.* is an intensely interesting play.

The Insect Play, by the brothers Capek, consists of three parts : a satire on sex passion, played by butterflies ; a satire on predatory civilisation, played by beetles and crickets and larvæ ; and a satire on mechanical civilisation, played by armies of ants who work and wage war at the bidding of their commanders. The prologue (played by a tramp and a butterfly-hunting professor), and the epilogue (played by mayflies and snails) are meant to illuminate the satire for us. They are to be rays on sunlight before and after the thunderstorm that shakes the insect world. It seems that the imagination of the Capeks is unequal to this task. There are flashes of genuine feeling in their reflections, but the larger imagination is lacking. The detail of the satire also is better conceived than developed. Ladies and gentlemen in evening clothes pursuing each other with shrill cries of "I love you ! I love you !" are the commonplace of drawing-room comedies, and they become no more distinguished when they wear antennæ and are called butterflies.

Among the crawling insects we see a pair of beetles rolling before them a ball of precious dirt that they call their capital, and looking for a hole

in which to hide it safely. We see the robber beetle, who steals it from them, to their vociferous alarm ; and the predatory fly who feeds his larva on nice young crickets, newly-wed ; and the chrysalis that holds the secret of calm and beauty in a restless world, but never quite imparts it to the listener. The conception is thoughtful ; the effect should be stronger. Among the ants we see the timekeeper who speeds up production for production's sake ; the inventor with ideas of destruction for destruction's sake ; the marching armies and their terrible commanders ; and the lady flag-seller who raises funds for the wounded.

Here at last the idea is expressed in dramatic movement. The stage army of ants shows us the other profile of victory, which is defeat ; and the authors show us the other face of satire, which is benevolence.

Georg Kaiser

The realists (who were the inventors of the problem play) had a weakness for asking questions about life. The expressionists have a preference for answering them. The difference is fundamental. It is the difference between the study of a phenomenon and the presentation of an idea. The realists were interested in ideas only in so far as they produced phenomena, and the expressionists are interested in phenomena only in so far as they interpret thoughts. Hence an expressionist play appears “distorted,” “overwrought,” “neurotic”

or even "insane" to the mind of the realist critic, just as the early paintings of the impressionists appeared grotesque and meaningless to the untrained eye of the spectator. Generally the inclination of the realist is for rounded outlines, irregular groupings, half-tones—indeed, for those characteristics that may be noticed in the ordinary landscape. But the crystal as well as the cabbage is a creation of natural forces, and the crystal was a symbol of beauty before naturalism or cubism were known. If expressionism means anything at all it means the crystallisation of a thought into the deliberate symmetry of drama. The result may very well take a shape unfamiliar to our eyes.

For Georg Kaiser the theatre is a rearrangement of intellectual particles. His personages are not in themselves interesting ; we have no desire to know them, though we admit their reality. They are wholly creatures of habit and desire, filling a place in the *schema* of the dramatist. We are reminded of the working of a dynamo. It is indeed a perfect piece of mechanism that functions in his dramas, though it is not the smooth mechanism of the mechanical playwright. Rather is it the intricate interplay of two forces, on the one hand a naked but shameless instinct, and on the other a sharp intellectual faculty that penetrates to the core of the subject without touching either the heart of emotional response or the deepest sense of poetry. The utterance is felt to be unequal to the importance of

the subject. The illumination is intense and intermittent, flash upon flash.

All these qualities are seen in *From Morn to Midnight* (*Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*), the drama of a bank cashier who embezzles money under the spell of the *beaux yeux* of a client at his counter, and is thereafter driven from pillar to post in mingled disillusionment and exaltation, casting his stolen money to the winds, until at last he shoots himself in a Salvation Army hall. The conception is distinguished, the technique masterly. A throng of nameless characters hurries across our field of vision, and if one of them pause but for an instant, the outline of his character remains fixed in the memory. But Georg Kaiser's imagination turns most of all to the sinister possibilities of his subject—the deadly and deadening satire of the cashier's home life, the flashy excitement of the crowd at the cycle races, the prostitute with a wooden leg at the cabaret, the lyrical salvation-seekers in the midst of "a city of asphalt." Of the actual technique of expression this passage is characteristic :—

CASHIER: Now—at this very moment—they've discovered everything ! I called for water to get the clerk out of the way—and again for water to clear the porter from the door. The notes are gone ; I'm missing. I mustn't show myself in the streets : the police are warned. Sixty thousand ! I must slip away across the fields—through the snow—before the whole town is on my track !

LADY : For Heaven's sake, stop !

CASHIER : I took all the money. It was because you filled

the bank. Your scent hung on the air. You glistened and rustled—you put your naked hand in mine—your breath came warm across the counter—warm—

LADY (*silencing him*) : Please !—I am a lady.

CASHIER : But now you must—

LADY (*controlling herself*) : Tell me, are you married ? Yes ? (*Violent gesture from CASHIER.*) Ah, that makes a difference. You gave way to a foolish impulse. Listen, you can make good the loss. You can go back to your counter and plead a passing illness—a lapse of memory. I suppose you still have the full amount ?

CASHIER : I've embezzled the money—

LADY (*abruptly*) : That really doesn't interest me.

CASHIER : I've robbed the bank.

LADY : You grow tedious, my dear sir.

CASHIER : And now you must—

LADY : The one thing I must do, is to—

CASHIER : After this you must—

LADY : Preposterous.

CASHIER : I've stolen for you. I've given myself into your hands, broken with the world, destroyed my livelihood. I've blown up every bridge behind me. I'm a thief and a criminal (*burying his face in his hands*). Now you must— ! After this you must !

LADY : I shall call my son. Perhaps he—

CASHIER (*with a change of tone, springs nimbly to his feet*) : Aha ! Call him, would you ? Rouse the hotel, give the alarm ? A fine plan !—A clumsy trick. You don't catch me so easily. Not in that trap. I have my wits about me, ladies and gentlemen. Yours come fumbling down afterwards, tapping like a blind man—but I'm always ahead of you. Don't stir. Sit where you are without a word, until I—(*he puts the money in his pocket*)—until I—(*he presses his hat over his eyes*)—until I—(*he wraps his coat closely about him*)—until I—(*softly he opens the glass door and slips out*).

Die Koralle and *Gas* are plays in which Kaiser seeks to portray, not the flight of a single individual from the consequences of his deed, but the universal flight of a nameless society from its nameless fears. Ambition, the will to power, the will to work are all of them manifestations of this breathless, backward-looking helter-skelter. The millionaire, who grew up in poverty and misery, has seized power not only through the weakness of others, but through his own confessed cowardice. He sets all his hopes upon the son who is to succeed him. He himself disburses great fortunes in charity through an institution ("The Earth's Warm Heart"), while his son sails the world. His yacht goes out to meet the wanderer; but it is as a stoker that the son reappears. He, too, is in flight—from riches. He is resolved to begin at the beginning, to suffer, to endure. The millionaire seeks a way of escape by changing places with his own secretary and double, who is distinguished from him only by possession of the "coral," a symbol of calm beauty in a restless ocean. It leads him to prison and death, which are the end of flight. A generation later, in *Gas*, the millionaire's son is director and trustee of a great co-operative factory for the production of a new gas that shall serve every purpose of industry. Upon this gas all social and political hopes are based; it is the symbol alike of the director's ideals and of the workmen's ambitions. The gas explodes and lays the factory in ruins. There was no flaw in the formula, but it exploded. Perhaps because there

was no flaw in the formula, because everything was perfect, it exploded. To rebuild or not to rebuild ? is now the problem for the millionaire's son. Gas or no gas ? is the question for the workers whose Utopia seems to have receded far into the future. Poison-gas is a by-product of the argument. And so, in the clash of formulas, ideas, rallying-cries and phantasmagoric representations of a technical world ill-controlled by human creatures, the two parts of the play run their course.

Rapid and sure characterisation, graphic gesture, concentration of dialogue into key-words and phrases from which thought is crystallised—these are the qualities of Kaiser's drama as a whole. Exaltation is there, but ecstasy fails. The art that transfigures reality is yet to seek.

Luigi Pirandello

The dramatist of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* turns the theatre, as we know it, upside down and inside out. His title conveys with admirable clearness the subject of the play. It is not paradoxical, for the essence of paradox is possibility. The putting of the cart before the horse is paradoxical only because it is feasible ; one can imagine a drunken farmer laboriously doing it. The putting of the characters before the author, on the other hand, carries us immediately on to a plane of wild supposition. We are interested in the idea, but at the same time we approach it with a certain caution. We have no intention of having

our leg pulled by Signor Pirandello, or for that matter, by any other dramatist. The theatre, we feel, is not the place for practical joking. The most successful dramatists have always been those who keep no secrets from their audience. It scarcely pays an author to hold a single card up his sleeve, much less a handful. We shall want to come to an understanding with Signor Pirandello. If this astonishing assumption about the characters and the author is to justify itself for dramatic purposes, it must be through a vigorous criticism of life and art, a criticism that is not only original, but inevitable. If the dramatist is to turn the theatre inside out, he must contract at the same time for an examination of its foundations. It is on these conditions that we cross the threshold of the theatre to see *Six Characters*.

Inside the theatre our attention is arrested at once by the absence of a curtain and the extraordinary appearance of the stage. In the average audience perhaps only one person in fifty has seen a bare stage—that grey box for the storage of dolls' houses, that lean and barren shed where illusion stands propped against the wall and sad-eyed efficiency in shirt-sleeves goes brusquely about its business. To those of us who know our stage from within, this melancholy scene is familiar ; but we are accustomed to connect it with a darkened theatre and rows of empty stalls where a producer lurks, and echoes of distant charwomen dusting the seats. The contrast between the bare stage and

the assembling audience in the lighted auditorium is decidedly remarkable. There is chaos, here is cosmos. There is rawness, here is cultivation. There is greyness, here is colour. There is reality, here is illusion. We perceive that Signor Pirandello has led off by scoring a good dramatic point. In a single stroke he has turned his theatre inside out as far as the mechanism is concerned. We await with curiosity the appearance of persons on that bare stage, for evidently the criticism of life and art is going to start from the beginning. By twos and threes the company of actors drifts in, the manager arrives, the prompter and stage manager take up their positions. They begin a rehearsal of a modern play. Naturally we expect that it will be a commonplace and realistic modern play which all the actors understand. But not at all; it is described by the producer as one of "these plays by Pirandello, plays nobody understands, written for the express intention of scoring off the actor, the manager, and the public." By this time we realize that Signor Pirandello is a baffling personality, capable of some refinement in his practical joking. The rehearsal proceeds. Then, outlined in a dim light that suggests something fantastic in their nature, the six characters appear. Their acquaintance should be made as they advance down the stage :—

The character called THE FATHER is about fifty, with hair thin on the temples, but scarcely bald. He is olive-skinned, with long, heavy moustaches curling round his still young

mouth, which is generally open in a curiously weak and uncertain smile. . . . His manner is sometimes gentle and mellifluous ; sometimes he has bursts of bitterness and harshness.

The MOTHER appears timid, and as though crushed beneath an intolerable weight of shame and sorrow. When she lifts her widow's veil she discloses a face pale as wax but without other signs of suffering. Her eyes are fixed on the ground.

The STEPDaUGHTER, aged eighteen, is petulant and almost impudent in her manner. She is very pretty, and dressed in black like her mother, but with showy smartness. She does not conceal her contempt for the frightened, troubled, bewildered air of her YOUNGER BROTHER, a heavy, dull-looking youth of fourteen ; but on the other hand, she is full of tenderness for her LITTLE SISTER, a child of four, dressed in white with a black sash.

The SON, a tall man of twenty-two, shows by the stiffness of his attitude a suppressed disdain for his father and an overwhelming indifference to his mother. He stands aloof and has evidently come on to the stage much against his will.

What do these people want ? asks the manager. It is the father who acts as spokesman. The fact is, he says, they have come to look for an author. What author ? Well, any author would do. The fact is, they have brought a drama with them. They are to clear out ? Really, would it not be more reasonable just to listen to what they have to say ? Is it not an actor's profession to give reality to imaginary persons for the amusement of an audience ? Nature makes use of the human mind to continue and perfect her own work of creation. The six characters desire to point out that they have as much right to

their existence as a tree or a butterfly. They have been born to be stage characters, but at present their drama is wasted because the author who imagined them either could not or would not translate them into the world of the theatre. Instinct impels them to seek an author who will fulfil their destiny by giving them life, if not for an eternity of fame, at least for a memorable hour. The play has yet to be written, but with the help of the manager and his company a draft of it may be completed. Yes, perhaps a draft. . . .

This is enough to enrage any manager. Plays are not drafted here, he thunders. They are acted, acted ! Where is the manuscript ? "It is in us," declares the father. These key-words seem to unlock the passions of the characters, and one after another joins in, with an outburst of irony or grief, until the framework of their relation to each other takes definite shape. The actors who are looking on begin by sneering, but are presently impressed. "What a telling scene !" exclaims one of them. It becomes poignant as the son and mother intervene at passionate cross-purposes, and suddenly terrible as the stepdaughter reconstructs the scene in the dressmaker's back parlour, with the show-cases, the mirror, the divan bed, and the envelope containing the money that was to be offered to her by her own father as her price. The furniture of that sordid room stands out clearly in our consciousness ; a realistic drama seems to threaten. It is the father who recalls us to the

former plane : “ How can we ever hope to understand one another, if to the words I speak I set the value and sense of things as they appear within me, while the listener gives them the sense and value that are within him ? ” But it is not surprising that this reflection should draw from the leading lady the abrupt query, “ Do you mind my asking, are we going on with the rehearsal ? ”

Soon it becomes very clear that they are not going on with the rehearsal. The drama of the six characters, unfolding itself in this queer sequence of recrimination, reflection, narrative and tortured exclamation, has thrust the other off the stage. The manager decides to reconstruct the play from the experience of his strange visitors. At first he wishes to do so through the medium of his own company of actors and stage properties ; and there begins the second part of Pirandello’s critique of the theatre.

The six characters are called upon to rehearse their own drama for the benefit of the company who will interpret it ; but the actors will not fit their parts, the properties and furniture are out of place, and already the *dramatis personæ* seem to hear their own words ring false. There are more recriminations, this time between the characters and the performers :—

FATHER : Haven’t we our own expression, our own personality ?

MANAGER : None whatever. Your personality is merely the raw material to which the actors give form and shape,

voice and gesture. They know how to give expression to much more exalted material, while yours is so insignificant that if it sustains the interest on the stage, the credit, believe me, will be entirely due to my company.

FATHER : I dare not contradict you, sir. But believe me, it is almost unbearable suffering for us, who are ourselves, with our own faces, our own bodies——

MANAGER (*ironically*) : But as far as the face is concerned, we remedy that with make-up, my dear friend !

FATHER : But the voice, the gesture——

MANAGER : Here it is the actor who will represent you.

FATHER : I understand perfectly ! And also I begin to understand why the author who created us and saw us real as we are, decided not to put us into a stage play. I would not for the world offend your actors ; heaven forbid ! But to see myself represented—I don't know by whom——

LEADING MAN (*haughtily*) : By me, if you don't mind.

FATHER (*humbly*) : Believe me, I am most honoured, my dear sir (*bowing*). But I feel that with all your art and all your best efforts you could never fit yourself into me——

LEADING MAN : Fit myself into you ! What do you mean by that ?

FATHER : The representation you will give, even when you have managed, by means of make-up, to get your face to look like mine——

LEADING MAN : Yes, that will certainly be a bit difficult ! (*The actors laugh*).

In rehearsing the crucial scene in the dressmaker's parlour, the characters evoke also the living figure of the dressmaker herself, Madame Pace, who thus, temporarily, joins their number to the consternation of the actor-spectators. In performing it afterwards, the actors embellish the scene with their conventional art, and thus make it

quite unrecognisable from the point of view of the characters. But when the stepdaughter and the mother occupy the stage again, and insist on playing out their scene to the end, they achieve an effect of dramatic climax that convinces everyone present. And later, when the stage is set for the culmination of the drama, and the son who has stood silent almost throughout the action ("I never make scenes") is compelled to take up his part, a revolver-shot is heard and a tragedy is evoked from the other world of narrative. The intruding characters gather up their dead and hurry off the stage with triumphant cries of, "Reality, reality!" "Go to the devil!" cries the manager. "You have wasted my whole morning."

Pirandello examines the whole field of dramatic illusion. He is a metaphysician as well as a playwright—a cool and clear thinker, a sensitive observer, an artist with a gift for vivid expression. The dialogue is lit by sudden flashes: "And now she gives to one fleeting, shameful moment of my life an importance which it ought never to assume for her." "Please, please do not speak of illusion; for us that word is a particularly cruel one." "A fact is like a sack, which will not stand upright when it is empty. In order to stiffen it, we must put into it the reasons and sentiments that have called it into being."

It is well that a writer should look so deeply for us into the fundamentals of his art, and still better that he should dramatise the result, in

all its humour and tragedy, as it is dramatised in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

Elmer Rice

One of the aims of the expressionists is to present character subjectively. We are asked to regard the persons on the stage, not only with our own eyes, but through their own emotional nature. There is nothing very revolutionary in this point of view. It may be that *Hedda Gabler* as lived by Hedda will differ considerably from *Hedda Gabler* as observed by Ibsen ; but we know that a dramatist's greatest efforts are always reinforced by subjective feeling. The duality of outward and inward life that lends magic to *The Lady from the Sea* or *The Master Builder* is in fact a duality of objective and subjective drama. It is expressionism that cries out in Ibsen's symbolic phrases as well as in the philosophy of Andreev or the poetry of Claudel. Yet this subjective portrayal of character is a hard matter for the objective stage. It depends upon action rather than upon words. It is not readily expressed in the ordinary medium of dramatic dialogue, a medium essentially realistic. A character subjectively presented is like a sleepwalker functioning in response to a hidden motive. He goes through the play wrapped in a mantle of sublime egoism. His part is not to listen, but to speak. Are such characters to address us directly or indirectly ? Are the words they speak to be intelligible to the other persons on the stage or only

to the mind of the listener? We know that thoughts (which the expressionist seeks to interpret) are not so mutually intelligible. Thoughts have no necessary common currency. In two peoples' minds there may be a parallelism of thoughts that will never meet or will never be mutually understood. They underlie the conventions of speech and the illusions of action; they are the hidden springs of personal being. If they be once revealed, the ordinary dramatic dialogue of mutual understanding, question and answer, retort and rejoinder, must go by the board; and in its place we have a dramatic dialogue where the characters speak, as it were, past each other and address themselves only to the comprehension of the audience. This is the expressive medium used by Mr. Elmer Rice in his play *The Adding Machine*. His Mr. Zero, one of the world's nobodies, who adds up figures in a department store, sits at a desk opposite his checker. They bend over their work and speak:—

ZERO: Your hair's gettin' grey. You don't wear them shirt waists any more with the low collars. When you'd bend down to pick somethin' up——

DAISY: I wish I knew what to ask for. Girl Takes Mercury after All-Night Party. Woman in Ten-Storey Death Leap.

ZERO: I wonder where she'll go when she gets out. Gee, I'd like to make a date with her. Why didn't I go over there the night my wife went to Brooklyn? She never woulda found out.

DAISY: I saw Pauline Frederick do it once. Where could I get a pistol though?

ZERO : I guess I didn't have the nerve.

DAISY : I'll bet you'd be sorry then that you'd been so mean to me. How do I know, though? Maybe you wouldn't.

ZERO : Nerve! I got as much nerve as anybody. I'm on the level, that's all. I'm a married man and I'm on the level.

DAISY : Anyhow, why ain't I got a right to live? I'm as good as anybody else. I'm too refined, I guess. That's the whole trouble.

ZERO : The time the wife had pneumonia I thought she was going to pass out. But she didn't. The doctor's bill was eighty-seven dollars. (*Looking up.*) Hey, wait a minute! Didn't you say eighty-seven dollars?

DAISY (*looking up*) : What?

ZERO : Was the last you said eighty-seven dollars?

DAISY (*consulting the slip*) : Forty-two fifty.

ZERO : Well, I made a mistake. Wait a minute. (*He busies himself with an eraser.*) All right. Shoot.

DAISY : Six dollars. Three fifteen. Two-twenty-five. Sixty-five cents. A dollar twenty. You talk to me as if I was dirt.

This dialogue is at the same time diffuse and concentrated, loosely related and firmly knit. It is true that the characters are deaf to one another, but they are heard the more plainly by the audience. We miss (with a certain satisfaction) the game of battledore and shuttlecock that is called dramatic dialogue. We rejoice in a freedom from irrelevancies and misunderstandings. The aim of the author is not to start a new dramatic hare at every turn of the conversation, but to present two characters to our notice, and this he does swiftly

and surely. It is plain that he speaks with the natural idiom of a dramatist and not with any borrowed accent or affectation. Mr. Rice sees people in that way ; his characterisation has the individual line. The old-fashioned critic of the stage will declare him to be incapable of writing drama, just as the old-fashioned critics of painting declared that the impressionists could never draw. But what can be expected of critics who confuse dramatic realism with the absence of the aside and the soliloquy ? Realism and expressionism represent attitudes of mind and not uses of theatrical machinery. The mental attitude of the author of *The Adding Machine* is original and sincere.

Events occur in the play—a quarrel, a murder, a trial, a verdict of guilty, an execution, a fantastic resurrection—but they are seen dimly as if in a dream, and it is only when they are unfolded through the actor's eyes that their nature is understood. The outward world is a mist through which the mind carries a lantern, casting strange shadows. I find Mr. Rice's illumination of everyday events more vivid than his fantastic speculations. His Mr. Zero in the counting-house, or at home with his cronies, Messrs. One, Two, Three and Four, is more convincing than Mr. Zero in the Elysian Fields, shocked by the presence of such fellow-spirits as Dean Swift and the Abbé Rabelais. (“What ! Ministers writin' smutty tales ! Say, what kind of a dump is this, anyway ? ”) That sort of fantasy leans to facetiousness, like the name

of the heroine, Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore ; and the weakness of American satire seems to lie in this tendency. But Zero on earth is a figure finely imagined, and at the same time, for all his subjectivity and expressionism, a figure of awful and shattering reality.

POETS AND HISTORIANS

POETS AND HISTORIANS

Paul Claudel

FROM the towers of the cathedral on the hill of Laon giant oxen look out toward the forest of St. Gobain, the castles of Coucy and Pierrefonds and the distant spires and poplars of Ile-de-France. They turn their backs on the plain that stretches as far as Rheims, the chalk downs and stunted trees of Champagne Pouilleuse, the broad green aprons that mark the windings of the upper Aisne and Marne. It is the land of chivalry. The Frankish kings made their hunting-seats in these valleys ; Pepin the Short was proclaimed at Soissons ; Charles VII passed this way to his crowning at Rheims under Joan's standard. The builders of the churches were royal masons.

Townsfolk and market-women climb the hill of Laon by a flight of steps. They pause for breath ; they set their baskets on the smooth-worn flagstones and shade their eyes to look back upon the plain. They are tanned and wrinkled folk. As you may read the age of a tree, so you may read the lines of harvests written on their faces. They climb the hill to trade, indeed, but also to pray. These are the great-grandchildren of the Middle Age ; this

is the heart of France. The peasants are one with their ancestors who built the tithe-barns and the chapels of the countryside. The very oxen in the plain are one with the oxen that dragged the stone for the cathedral (of their own accord, as folk-lore has it) up the hill. The blood that flowed on the Chemin-des-Dames or the Moronvilliers Hills, even under Nivelle and Desgoutte and Mangin, was the blood of Templars and Hospitallers. And was it not on the Marne that Charles Péguy of the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, “le noble Péguy,” fell ?

Of this vast tradition of piety and warfare, this endless line of corn-sheaves and ever-flowing stream of wine and ceaseless music of the chimes, Paul Claudel also is a part. It is idle to dub him a neo-Catholic and neo-Royalist, it is vain to laugh his mediævalism out of court. The legend of his forebears lives in him. Some unbelievers, like Maeterlinck, have sought to recapture the mediæval spirit ; but Claudel is a believer. *L'Annonce Faite à Marie* is a mediæval mystery, but it belongs to our own time. The tithe-barn of Combernon on the hill of Monsanvierge is one of those farm buildings whence the doves took flight in the autumn of the Aisne—around which black men and white men, Frenchmen and Germans, Englishmen and Americans and Italians dug trenches and laid belts of wire. How long before these, too, are a legend, like the predatory Saracens and the mercenary Swedes ? Already they are a legend, and they lived but yesterday ; their bones are scarcely whitened on the

Chemin-des-Dames. How long before the giant oxen crumble on the towers of Laon ? That will take longer. How long before the tradition is forgotten ? Not while the doves fly home to their farmstead, says Claudel ; not while grapes are gathered and fields are sown. He will have it that *L'Annonce Faite à Marie* is not only a mystery, but a present reality ; he will have it that the corporate life we call legend is greater than the corporate life we call thought. He maintains that history itself is but a limb of the body legendary. It is with this understanding that his plays must be approached.

Pierre de Craon, the leprous master-mason of *L'Annonce*, links his own time with ours. He is of that Craonne where Napoleon won a victory, and on whose " California Plateau," above the Aisne, Wilhelm II watched the last advance of the German armies. Pierre has left us, he says, the Wise and the Foolish Virgins sculptured in Rheims. He claims for his own the churches of Vertus, " comme un beau jeune homme au milieu de la Craie Champenoise," and of Fond-d'Ardenne, " qu'on entend le soir appeler comme un taureau du milieu de ses marécages." Their present stones are a buttress of the legend. " Tout le drame," says Claudel, " se passe à la fin d'un Moyen-Age de convention, tel que les poètes du Moyen-Age pouvaient se figurer l'antiquité." We know that the ancient age as sung by the poets is the only true antiquity ; and shall not the Middle Age as portrayed by the dramatist be the only authentic mystery ?

In the prologue Violaine, one of the two daughters of the farm, bends to kiss the face of Pierre at their parting. It is a year since they met, and a year also since the “silver flower” of leprosy blossomed on the mason’s body. He loves her, but loves also his art and his vocation. She loves him, perhaps, but will marry Jacques, the farmer’s son :

Je suis Violaine, j’ai dix-huit ans, mon père s’appelle Anne Vercors, ma mère s’appelle Elisabeth.

Ma sœur s’appelle Mara, mon fiancé s’appelle Jacques. Voilà, c’est fini, il n’y a plus rien à savoir.

Tout est parfaitement clair, tout est réglé d’avance et je suis très contente.

Je suis libre, je n’ai à m’inquiéter de rien, c’est un autre qui me mène, le pauvre homme, et qui sait tout ce qu’il y a à faire !

Semeur de clochers, venez à Combernon ! nous vous donnerons de la pierre et du bois, mais vous n’auriez pas la fille de la maison !

If symbolism were the motive of the drama of Claudel we should say that this woman stands for the spirit of wisdom. But symbolism is the modern reading of the ancient text, symbolism is the glib key to the universal riddle. Pierre de Craon’s leprosy, although mysterious indeed, is a terrible reality underlying the action. It is a fact and not a symbol, it is the mortified flesh imprisoning the ardent soul. The “silver flower” blossoms on Violaine’s body when Pierre is gone, and her spirit of wisdom transcends the body and becomes a flame of religious devotion :

Pourquoi veux-tu m'épouser ? pourquoi veux-tu
Prendre pour toi ce qui est à Dieu seul ?
La main de Dieu est sur moi et tu ne peux me défendre !
O Jacques ! nous ne serons pas mari et femme en ce monde !

She confesses her leprosy and is banished to the wilds to be consumed. Her father has set out for the Crusades ; Pierre de Craon is still a builder of churches. Her sister Mara, the passionate Mara “qui dit toujours la vérité,” marries Jacques. Their only child dies, and Mara brings its body to the cavern of Violaine. “Il est facile d'être une sainte quand la lèpre nous sert d'appoint,” is the thought that has crossed her mind. She entreats her sister to restore the child to life, if not for her own sake, then for the sake of Jacques, who is still ignorant of its death. Violaine wrestles with “la suprême tentation,” protesting vehemently that she is no saint ; but at the sound of the Angelus and of the trumpets heralding a journey of the king to Rheims, the miracle is accomplished, and life is reborn. The child's eyes are blue like those of Violaine, and a drop of milk is on its lips.

Violaine is found half-buried in the sand-pit where Pierre de Craon mixes mortar for his masonry. He carries her back to Combernon, and there she speaks with Jacques, the man with whom she must inevitably speak. They understand each other. In all this mystery there is no darkness. Between these characters exists a limpid comprehension. They are the intelligences of their faith. The drama springs not from their passions but from their

aspirations. Violaine goes quietly to the death that comes to meet her, “ l’obscurcissement comme d’un ombrage très obscur.” And her father comes home from his Crusade to salute the soil of France and the walls of Monsanvierge ; and Jacques laments over the love of Violaine who is lost to him ; and Mara, whose hand it was that led her blind sister to the sand-pit, pours out her passionate confession from a passionate heart ; and again all is forgiven. The rest of the play is an ecstatic chorus, a chant heralding the final miracle, which is the sounding of the bells from the towers of empty Monsanvierge.

L’Otage has the outward semblance of historical drama, since it concerns the dramatic moment of Bonaparte’s first abdication. It numbers among its characters Pope Pius VII, Louis XVIII, and even the foreign monarchs by whose patronage the Bourbons were restored. We soon perceive, however, that the interest lies not in the historical motive but in its reflexes. Claudel’s chief characters, Georges and his cousin Sygne de Coûfontaine, are the last survivors of their race, and the shadow of extinction falls upon them. “ Mon fief est en mon royaume comme une petite France,” declares Georges, “ la terre en moi et ma ligne devient gentille et noble comme une chose qui ne peut être achetée. . . . Et comme le vin de Bouzy n’est pas celui d’Esseaume, c’est ainsi que je suis né Coûfontaine par fait de la nature à quoi les Droits de l’Homme ne peuvent rien.” The guillotine has lopped off a branch here and a branch there, but

the approaching end will be the uprooting of the whole tree. Georges, whose wife was mistress of the Dauphin and whose children have died in banishment, is an adventurer and emissary between France and England in the Royalist cause, while Sygne has acquired a despoiled Cistercian monastery with the remnant of her fortune and is preserving religiously the few possessions without which aristocracy is vain. Georges carries off the Pope from one of Napoleon's prisons and gives him a hiding-place in the hope of gaining him as a supporter of the Bourbon cause. The Pope is tracked down by one Toussaint Turelure, a fantastic and gross plebeian, zealous in the bloody work of 1793 and since rewarded by a high command under the Empire. The irony of the drama will have it that the Holy Father can be saved only by the marriage of Sygne to this same Turelure, red-handed as he is with the blood of her parents and her priests. Religion demands that she shall consent, and not with loathing for her husband, but with resignation, as becomes a saint. By another irony of the drama the king can be restored only by the aid of the monstrous Turelure, who is ready enough to turn Legitimist for the occasion ; and so Georges besmirches his honour by suing for Turelure's support, just as Sygne has besmirched her own by bearing him a son. The ending brings death to these two last of their race who have outlived their usefulness. " *Est ce que les hommes ont encore besoin de nous avec eux ?* " asks Sygne. " *Pas plus que de Coucy et*

ses tours. Les hommes n'ont plus besoin entre eux d'un homme plus haut."

The irony is deep and fine, and the historical impulse has moved Claudel to some of his most eloquent passages. The general development of the drama, with the grand dilemma of Sygne, is less convincing. Her choice between personal dis-honour and religious infidelity is a theme rather for the author of *Monna Vanna* than for Claudel. There is no inevitable tragedy in the figure of Sygne, and we feel that the balance of the drama has been in some degree disturbed to prove the author's point. Much more admirable is the long intellectual struggle between Georges and the Pope, with secular passion dashing itself against the rock of religious diplomacy. Toussaint Turelure also is a figure of gigantesque humour, with the mind of a Machiavel in his misshapen butcher's body. His author, we feel, hates him well and hates him worthily. Observe the creature sipping his coffee after luncheon and leering at his hostess :

Et me voilà, gardant à la fois l'amour de l'ordre et l'instinct de la précaution,

(Il aspire l'air légèrement)

Avec le nez du chien de chasse qui reconnaît son gibier.

SYGNE : Monsieur le prefet, c'est donc en partie de police quo vous êtes venu chez moi aujourd'hui ?

LE BARON TURELURE : Quelle horreur ! Est-ce qu'on entend rien de facheux de Coûfontaine ?

Tout est calme dans nos bois comme au temps des moines.

Pas de diligences culbutées, pas d'histoires de refractaires. On dirait que votre presence est une protection pour le pays.

(Il clôt un œil).

There are few dramatists who could venture this wink with success. But laughter is a part of the tradition that Claudel has inherited. His scenes are infused with latent humour. The Toussaint Turelures of the world are the gargoyles of his cathedral, and even his sculptured angels do not forget to smile.

And what have the characters of these dramas to say to us? For all their humanity they belong to a world other than our own, a world of another outline and proportion and even of other dimensions. They are saints and devils drawn with the hand of the primitive. Although their faith is the lamp of a common temple and their emotions are the sum of a common experience, although they are rooted in the fruitful earth and bear the agelong burden of feudal devotion, they are nevertheless translated into this other world by their author's lyrical utterance, which is the voice of his own belief. We cannot hob-nob with them, and we must listen at a certain distance. For Claudel the passing of the king on his journey to Rheims is not only an appeal to loyalty but a mystical and ecstatic rite linked with the building of churches and the sounding of the Angelus. He approaches history only to strike a chord between the known and the imagined. The present and visible world of the spectator can scarcely be said to exist for him. Here is the most evident distinction between his theatre and that of the earlier Maeterlinck. In *Pelléas* or *Les Sept Princesses*, however remote the action of the drama

may be from conventional space and time, we are always conscious of the presence of the reasoning listener. He is the interpreter of the symbolic thought ; it is to his judgment that the dramatist finally appeals. Claudel is his own arbiter, for he lives himself in the world he has imagined, and its reason or unreason invites no outward scrutiny.

Yet the radiance of his characters witnesses not only to a poet's mind but a profound gift for presentation. Are there any figures to match them in the whole of modern drama—such saints and sinners, such embodiments of fine conceptions, such many-sided creatures linked to one another by bonds of poignant interest ? The successive unfolding of their relations shows a master's hand. What Ibsen did in *The Wild Duck* or *Little Eyolf* Claudel does in *L'Annonce*. His theatre of the Middle Age is a theatre of to-day. The spectator indeed assists at this drama, but he assists as a mind initiated into the mystery. It is thus that the spiritual gestures of the actors become intelligible, and their message from the legendary kingdom may be deciphered.

John Drinkwater

Abraham Lincoln owed as much to President Wilson as to its own titular hero. It was a play of the hour, and in every line an allusion to the momentous issues of the hour could be heard. For large audiences (including returned soldiers among their number) it was the first drama to break the spiritual silence of five years. After the manner of plays with

a message, it was open to more than one interpretation. Its sternness may have fortified those stalwarts who saw in the enemies of their country a band of moral outlaws and harbingers of slavery. Its sublimation of the passions was equally a reminder that other wars than that of North and South are wars of brothers, and its appeal to statesmanship was an invocation to Versailles. The play brought a new audience into the theatre. The Puritans (who are more numerous than the Non-conformists) found the author zealous in good works. Everywhere he was acclaimed by men of goodwill. In fine, the importance of *Lincoln* was ethical, political, social, and Mr. Drinkwater was not yet a biographer, but a prophet.

With the advent of *Mary Stuart* it was necessary to reconsider him as an artist. A historian, plainly, he was not. No historical dramatist is a historian. From Æschylus to Shakespeare and our day, historical drama has always been a masquerade of the contemporary spirit. Nor was he in the narrower sense a biographer. A good portrait, it has been well said, is one in which we recognize the painter. A good play is one in which we recognize the author. What we shall look for in this *Mary Stuart* is a portrait of Mr. Drinkwater. Mary's own portrait (as in the prologue) may hang on the wall, and the incidents of her life may be reviewed for the sake of a young man smarting under the loss of a young wife's affection. But we shall not believe in Mary Stuart absolutely. We shall believe in her relatively,

and it rests with the author to furnish the relation. We return always to what Mr. Drinkwater thinks about her, which is very much what he thought about Abraham Lincoln, and very much what he thinks about the world in general. This woman has distinction and beauty of character ; she has courage and wit. Can it be truly said that she lives ? It is foreshadowed in the prologue that at the heart of her history lies “ the one glowing reality, a passionate woman.” She lives as the illustration of her moral ; she lives up to it, as people say. She explains herself satisfactorily. She coquets with Rizzio, she despises Darnley as we all despise him, she accepts Bothwell with a shrug ; and the end of it is that she intellectualizes for us “ the one glowing reality ” of the modern prologue. She sets out deliberately to be an abstraction, and there she succeeds.

Abstractions, nevertheless, have their qualities. The best of this play is its quality of unexpectedness —the turning away from empty rhetoric that fills out dramatic situations, the turning inward to the idea behind the drama. In that respect Mr. Drinkwater belongs to his age, and is in touch with the movement that is surely spreading over the European theatre. He accepts no cheap appearances ; he is for what he believes to be the inward truth at all costs. When Mary learns that the wretched Darnley, murderer of Rizzio, is himself about to be murdered by his rebel lords with Bothwell’s knowledge, she mutters the few words : “ Poison—this

life—all of it. Barbs, barbs." No rhetoric here, no playing with smooth verses or smooth prose lines that round off the dramatic effect, but a concentration on the symbols that express emotion. "There are tides in me as fierce as any that have troubled women," says this Mary. And again, "I am wiser even than my blood." The urgent force of the idea is there. Its springs lie deeper than realism, deeper also than wit or what is conventionally called poetry (meaning the declamation of speeches). There is dynamic power in these words that gather up the thought, and are themselves gathered up and thrown like spray from a wave of feeling. It is only one step from this dynamic force to the last embodiment of the dramatic idea, which is ecstasy; but it is a long step for Mr. Drinkwater to take. The Puritans who are his natural audience mistrust ecstasy, rapture, poetic exaltation, or whatever it may be called that lifts men in a non-moral sense above themselves. If Mary Stuart were ever rapturous we might understand her better, and know why it was that she broke hearts and troubled kingdoms. She is always wiser than her blood—too much wiser, as we feel. Hers is a composite portrait. A little history and much philosophy and some poetry have gone to its making; but behind the lineaments of this spirited beautiful creature in ruff and farthingale a discerning eye may note the sterner features of Praise-God Barebones.

Oliver Cromwell is surely a play after the drama-

tist's heart. However fond Mr. Drinkwater may have grown of Mary Stuart, we feel that in the end he was glad to be rid of the minx, with her Renaissance airs and graces breaking in upon the solemnity of sermon-time. The clank of spurs and the thump of brass-bound Bibles are indeed manlier to the ear. And this play, more than the other, offers scope for the craft of the true biographer—the craft of reflected portraiture, the mirroring of mind in mind. "Mr. Milton has been reading to me this afternoon," says old Mrs. Cromwell as she lies abed. What Mrs. Cromwell says may not be dramatic evidence, and yet it carries weight with the jury. John Milton, we may be sure, wasted none of his leisure hours in reading "Paradise Regained" at the bedside of the Stuarts. When Milton crossed a threshold and grasped a hand, the hand was clean and the hearth something more than Puritan. He came as the world's ambassador to the court of greatness. Oliver Cromwell was a plain country gentleman, but he was Milton's friend; he was a stern soldier, but he was also "our chief of men." As with Milton, who remains a hearsay witness, so it is with Hampden and Ireton, who appear. Their friendship transfigures Cromwell, illumines his sombre character, lends eloquence to his curt speech. So let Little Arthur rage, and W. G. Wills imagine a vain thing. This Cromwell has his faults, but he is still "our chief of men."

His biographer also is a dramatist. He makes no pretence of aloofness, but himself speaks with

friendly warmth. Upon the whole he speaks well, though his literary silences are hard to endure. It is in the nature of the subject that Cromwell should at times overwhelm us by his nobility. If presbyter be priest writ large, we must accept the pontifical immensity of the Arch-Independent, or Lord High Nonconformist, in the full blast of benediction upon friends and malediction upon enemies. It is in the nature of the subject that Cromwell should sometimes appear to address himself to our particular pew ; and we leave the theatre with a feeling of surprise that the singing of the Doxology, or at least of the Old Hundredth, should not bring the proceedings to a close. Puritanism belongs to the spirit of the man ; it is a ray of the light of character that streams from him.

And *Robert E. Lee*? We who are not moral biographers, but common hero-worshippers, may be pardoned for grudging to the great Southern general a degree of nobility that was proper to the characters of Lincoln and Cromwell. The pedestal we have each of us privately built for greatness is threatened with overcrowding at the summit. We admit a new claimant with the utmost unwillingness. We yearn secretly for a Frederick the Great or a Machiavelli who will lend stability to the lower portion of the structure. And yet, as his author proves, General Lee has an incontestable right to high place. We believe in him as a great soldier, a far-sighted citizen, a magnanimous enemy, a warm-hearted friend. We accept his strategy and

his tactics, his victories and his defeats, his generous impulses and his sagacious reticences. We believe even in his sense of humour, for a twinkle seems to enliven that weather-beaten eye. If he have a fault, it is that of being over-rational. His wisdom flows too readily from the springs of action. He pauses in the midst of a natural gesture to utter the unnatural word. The roar of battle is suddenly hushed, and reason speaks. Our consolation must be found in the doubt whether the annals of history contain enough men both great and good to last Mr. Drinkwater for the rest of his natural life as a dramatist. One day he will have to start on the rogues. It will be a joyous occasion.

James Elroy Flecker

James Elroy Flecker met the classical fate of the lyric poet. While he lived his work went begging, and he sold his verses for a song. He fell ill, lay for a while among the groves of Lebanon, and died in the cold sunshine of Davos, where youth winters in the bloom of health and sickness declines from summer to autumn. Now his memory is honoured, his early editions are prized, and managers give his Eastern play a setting of magnificence. When they have done their work, and done it well, Hassan remains—the play that Flecker wrote to please himself and not to please the public ; the play that grew as a tree grows, sprung from a seed of thought and nourished by the sap of fantasy. We can trace its original form of episodic conceit, the dew-draught

of character, the branching inventions of intrigue, the putting forth of the sensitive shoots that form the secondary motive, the storm of cruelty—and horror that shakes the boughs, the burgeoning and blossoming of the whole in the spring that blows from Samarkand. Such work must confound all dull instructors in the craft of play-making. This poet masters the stage intuitively; he has the dramatist's pair of hands. With him the art of presentation comes first. Hassan the confectioner—how likeable, how fanciful, how moving, but above all how *presentable* a character! In two minutes we know the man, in three we vow comradeship with him to the end of the tale. His modesty, his humour, his love of beauty enter into all these scenes of Bagdad, with their crumbling white walls and painted pavilions and golden palaces. The spectacle of the play itself is a procession that passes before his eyes. Simpler settings may be devised by future producers, but the presence of this character alone ensures that pageantry shall never overweight drama. He commands respect for the muse.

Hassan is fine-grained, though coarse of presence. His passion is fine-grained, though coarse of utterance. For him a soul lives in a woman behind the almond paste of flesh that the confectioner justly esteems; and if he cannot find it the woman is naught. It is a convention that the fair shall favour the prosperous and love the rich. Is it not the convention of half our entertainments? Hassan, obscure

and cumbersome, is scorned by his mistress ; but when he is raised to the Caliph's favour she drops a rose at his feet. The heroine of our latest musical comedy may do as much, and be little blamed for it. But to Hassan's mind the rose is poisoned. "Last night I baked sugar, and she flung me water ; this morning I bake gold, and she flings me a rose. Empty, empty, I tell you, friend, all the blue sky." It is this same fine-grained nature that makes him rebel against the cruelties and tyrannies of the Caliphate, though his own good citizen's inclination is always to bow the knee to the Commander of the Faithful. His silence is eloquent in the trial scene when he sits at the despot's right hand. It is this nature that impels him to seek in others a passion finer than his own, and to defend it loyally—to stand sentinel over the pair of condemned lovers, to intercede for them, to protest against their torture, to forfeit all his new-won dignities, and in the end to take the "golden road" that leads pilgrims as well as merchants away from the reeking walls of Bagdad into the open country and the unknown.

When this epic of character is unfolded on the stage, shall we talk of literature or pageantry ? No, this is drama, if the word have any meaning ; and the beauty of scene and music and costume is all of it treasure laid at the feet of Hassan, as the slaves of the Caliphate laid carpets and ornaments. A slovenly, unlovely figure of a man, quick in thought, slow in speech, firm in friendship, a

fountain of integrity, a well of humour ; he will surely live in the history of our theatre, and actors in years to come will number him among their classical parts.

Halcott Glover

It was doubtless the historical parallel that led Mr. Glover to the writing of his play, *Wat Tyler*. The return of a disillusioned army from the fields of Artois and Picardy ; the tramp of desperate bands of workless men in search of a land fit for heroes ; the enactment of a Statute of Labourers to make the daily groat a fixed wage in a world of mounting values ; the imposition of a poll tax to crown the direst poverty of the greatest number ; all of these happenings have their interest for our time. As significant to our ears are the foreign mutterings of that restless fourteenth century : the rout of the pride of chivalry by troops of simple yeomen and burghers at Crécy, Bannockburn and the Battle of the Spurs ; the uprising of such ungainly but commanding figures as Jacques van Artevelde in Ghent and Etienne Marcel in Paris ; the earliest handclasp of common interest and comradeship through the walls of national pride. These men of the fourteenth century came nearer breaking their bonds than their successors for many a day. Yet for all the clearness of the economic issue between master and man, and for all the simplicity of the political struggle, there is something strange and legendary in the history of

the Peasants' Revolt. The spirit of the Dark Ages broods over Europe and hangs like a mist upon the English lanes and hedgerows. The very hawthorns are blurred in the spring sunshine. Men like Wat Tyler or Jack Straw loom up gigantic and grotesque, holding a scythe or a pewter pot of ale. John Ball gesticulates for a moment above the throng, and is plucked away by the sleeve of his preacher's gown. In East Anglia an obscure and forgotten yokel proclaims himself "the people's king" and feasts in country-houses whose owners are made to wait at his table. King Richard, a boy of twelve, is led at his mother's apron-strings through the corridors of the Tower of London ; his counsellors feast in the Savoy Palace ; the city merchants chaffer, the farmers grumble, and at cross-roads the gallows creak beneath their heavy burden. The bishop of Winchester leases the brothels of Southwark for a revenue of forty pounds a year, finding their possession incompatible with his dignity ; and good citizens are ferried over in the hours of darkness to visit the Flemish women in their houses with the painted signs. Knots of talkers gather about the village crosses and on the village greens, and the song of Piers Plowman finds a chorus in the rhymes that are carried by wandering priests and journeymen. For long generations this rebellion was known as "the great murmuring." It was a wonder and a portent. It marked the mysterious childhood of a democracy.

Wat Tyler seeks to dramatise not only the happenings but the mysteries of the time, and that is both the strength and the weakness of the play. The spirit of the revolt has taken hold of Mr. Glover's imagination, so that his speech is one long fragmentary murmur. A mist descends upon the action before our eyes. It is no false antiquarian turn of dialogue, no garnishing of Wardour Street, that gives these personages their character of fantastic remoteness. The very truth of the interpretation sets up a barrier between us. At the end of the drama those June days of 1381 still appear clouded, but we are conscious of having lived through them. It is a fragment of our own experience that holds the stage. The events are uncertain in sequence and indefinite in meaning, like events of late years that have trodden too fast upon each other's heels in the headlines of the newspapers and have not yet had time to recede into the perspective of history. That is a penalty of the parallel that the dramatist has drawn, but it is also a tribute to his creative spirit. It may be that all true historical drama should be written in the fashion of *Wat Tyler*—with a purposeful neglect of dramatic situations like the meeting of king and rebel on Smithfield, but with an endeavour to find the significance of action in the humbler background. Of *Wat Tyler* we know little, and had Shakespeare given him a place in the annals of villainy we should have known even less. Jack Straw's name is perhaps suitably immortalised in

the names of various inns north of the Thames. These were common men, “ unknown till the end of the world.” They speak no common language in this play, but are interpreters for other men :

When I served in France I had no love of death on the battlefield, yet I drew my bow with the rest. In every hour we breathe, we poor men run risk of our lives and liberties, and though we be peaceable, many die miserably. Is death more terrible when faced in hope of betterment than at the light word of lord or king ? We strike our blow according to the faith that is in us, and if we die, we die as soldiers.

We cannot doubt that the dumb spirit of the Peasants’ Revolt speaks here, and speaks to more purpose than in clashing scenes of sword-play, huzzas and movement and pageantry. In few historical dramas can we be sure that the heroes would even recognize themselves if they could see a performance. *Wat Tyler* is one of the few. We are sure that the popular leader would not only approve the political sentiments of Mr. Glover, but would even find himself rudely moved by the utterance of thoughts that had never ventured to hob-nob with the pint-pot at his lips, the hammer in his hand and the wench at his side. And thus the spiritual realities of history are rescued from the historians.

Ernst Toller

The dramas of Toller sprang hot and passionate from the ending of the slaughter in Europe. The sunken roads were still reeking with the

fumes of gas, the rank grass of the battlefield was still strewn with helmeted sacks of mortality that had been enemies, the rubble of shattered villages lay still untrodden by the foot of the civilian. The grand chorus of the world Press was swelling into songs of triumph or groans of humiliation. Defeated princes were toppling from their thrones, and victorious statesmen were congratulating themselves that they and not their generals had effectively won the day. Ragged prisoners of war slouched homeward to the west through the ranks of the advancing vanguard, and hordes of Russian peasants who had tilled the vineyards of the Rhine since Tannenberg began to move like ants across a continent to their own devastated countryside. Well-fed armies marched forward joylessly, with the habit of discipline preserved ; ill-fed armies mutinied and broke. Workmen's councils, soldiers' councils arose here and there, gesticulated for a day or two and were engulfed in the quick-sands of impotence. The ministries of propaganda had done their work too well ; a cloud of hatred darker than at any time in the struggle hung over this November hour of Armistice.

Out of the darkness a voice cried for humanity as Henri Barbusse had cried from the trenches of France and Romain Rolland from his exile. A soldier's voice cried "Comrade, Comrade!" not as the grey stumbling prisoners had cried the words at the point of the bayonet, but as man cries to man and friend to friend. Toller was already

fitted to plead, and even to command. He had known the enthusiasms and the disillusionments of the soldier. He had been bespattered with Frenchmen's blood in the sector of Bois-le-Prêtre, above the Moselle, and in those tangled thickets had come upon a pile of corpses locked in the embrace of death, with clenched fists raised to heaven in witness against the enmity dividing them. After a year in the trenches he was invalidated. Later, as a student in Munich and Heidelberg, he gathered followers about him with grandiose dreams of a universal league of youth that should end all war. In the new year of 1918 he led a strike of munition workers in the Bavarian city, where highly-paid mechanics released from military service responded to the call of "No bullets for our comrades of other lands." He was re-conscripted and imprisoned. *Die Wandlung* was begun in the prison yard, written on scraps of paper at the hour of exercise. The November revolution led him to Munich, where he was elected chairman of the central workmen's and soldiers' council. Although at first opposed to a premature seizure of power by labour, he accepted the mandate of the spontaneous uprising of March, 1919, in the Bavarian cities, and entered the Bavarian Soviet Government as the Munich council's representative. Under the first Soviet régime he was president of the council, under the second a Red guardsman. Yet he set his face resolutely against counsels of violence: "Blood

has flowed in streams and rivers during the four years of the imperialistic nations' butchery. Now let every drop of the precious juice be preserved in crystal goblets." Munich was soon isolated from the rest of Germany, and even from Bavaria. The republic was crushed with the help of a Prussian invasion, and Toller was arrested. He was brought to trial in July, 1919, on a charge of high treason, and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in a fortress.

This history must be understood if the passion and pity of his dramas are to be comprehended. They are documents of his time and our own, written in our common blood. The thought of literature is remote from this poet's mind; his inspiration is the beat of the living pulse. Such a creative mind is not to be regarded with the observer's eye trained in the calm assimilation of the headline, or with the half-humorous pharisaic spirit of the victorious islander who thanks God daily that he is not as other Europeans are. They are our dead who rise up in fantasy on Toller's stage, they are our poor who cry in the streets and our maimed who hug the secret of their impotence. If there be an epic of war and peace fit to embrace all the happenings of these years—the wrestling of nation with nation and man with man and body with spirit, the stirring of the soul beneath the vast encumbrance of mechanical fate, the light of meaning illuminating depths of horror—it must be sought in these

dramas that come glowing from the anvil of suffering, and are at once phantasmagoric in semblance and ardent in reality.

The thirteen scenes or "images" of *Die Wandlung* (The Transformation) are preceded by a prologue representing a cemetery of soldiers' graves in which War Death in a steel helmet drills his troops of skeletons in front of Peace Death in a silk hat. At first their smartness of manœuvre imposes on the civilian, who cannot hope for such an effect from his rabble of dotards with umbrellas. "Good colleague," he cries, "you are the principle of order; in my realm chaos rules." But presently he laughs the other bitterly out of countenance. The differences of rank are too much for him. In his realm at least all men are equal, and he is no corporal to mumble the hypocrisy of phrases. The action begins in the home of Friedrich, the young sculptor who enlists for foreign service as an enthusiastic volunteer, filled with the thought that "this war will unite us all." He travels to the front in a troop-train packed with soldiers who are chorus to the movement: "For ever we run on; for ever grinds the mill." He lies at sunset in a wilderness where he volunteers for patrol duty; and skeletons whirl in a dance of death before his eyes. In hospital delirium overtakes him, and fearful images of the assemblage of arms and legs and trunks by "professors of synthesis" haunt his mind. He returns home to finish his giant

statue of the victorious Fatherland, but shatters it in rage and wanders through byways of blind negation. In a vision he sees the high-flung arch of the cathedral of humanity spring from the lap of earth ; but the men who should enter it are only caricatures and phantoms of men, martyred by machinery, tortured by hatred, buried under the dead weight of the material struggle. He cries to them : “ Brothers, reach me your crippled hands ! March by the light of day ! ” Here is an imagination that ennobles not only common things, but common conceptions. With Toller there are no *clichés*, no hackneyed phrases, no worn and weary metaphors. Passion transfigures them as the spirit of Friedrich is transfigured, and dead words rise up again to do battle for the living thought.

Masse-Mensch (Masses and Man), “ a play of the social revolution in the twentieth century,” is a work that defies summary in outward form. A workman’s strike and a rattle of machine-guns ; a Bourse crowded with noisy jobbers and brokers gambling on the fortunes of war ; a woman labour leader who is far-sighted and masses who grope for passion in the dark ; a prison cell, warders and prisoners, a farewell, and a salvo in the yard ; how can these outward semblances represent the drama ? The action lies deep in the mind, where image calls to image and word echoes word with a gaunt and passionate will to utterance. The appearance of action is thrown up, as it were, by

burning thought ; it is volcanic, luminous, unearthly, terrible. But the mind is swept by winds that sow beauty ; it is warmed by the radiance that blisters and scorches the world of unreality. The mind blossoms when the outward image fades. The chorus of the masses cries :

We, ever crammed within
Ditches of towering house-walls,
We, ever made the sport
Of systems and machines,
We, sightless in the night of tears,
We, ever-orphaned children,
From depths of factories we cry,
When shall our love be life ?
When shall our work be joy ?
When shall deliverance come ?

They are answered with the cry, " Masses are power, masses are deeds " from the nameless leader who seeks an immediate revolutionary decision. But the woman leader answers at the end, " Masses are trampled cornfields, masses are buried men. . . . Moloch is he who demands the shedding of blood for his sake. God is Moloch. The State was Moloch. Masses are Moloch. Holy is none but the free humanity of working folk." Here the key-words of expressionism ring out : " Masses are trampled cornfields, masses are buried men." The thought moves swiftly to a goal. An image rises of a man able to match his own inward strength against the assault of Fate ; to stand and withstand, alone and in the

mass. A drama rises behind the appearance of action that has held the stage, the drama of the individual and the mass, the drama indeed of our century.

In *Die Maschinenstürmer* (The Machine-Wreckers), Toller's play of the English Luddites, the symbols of historical drama are made to represent the realities of our own day. It is the legacy of European war, as well as the introduction of steam-driven machinery, that reduces the weavers of Nottingham to starvation and despair. There are no markets for the textile trade, "all Europe is crippled by a load of debt," and manufacturers reduce output while at the same time they replace "hands" by the iron fingers of the fearsome and fabulous engine. On every hand is famine in the midst of plenty :

Here men go hungry, there the granaries
Are choked with mildewed corn. Here is no coal,
The people freeze, and there, above the pits,
The coal stands mountain-high.

Lord Byron rises in the House of Lords to oppose the Frame-Work Bill (1812) which would add the breaking of stocking-frames to the score of capital offences. He lashes the Bill with irony and contempt :

The sword, as ever, is a shift of fools
To hide their folly.
Let us consider well this rabble, lords :
It is the rabble digging in your fields,
It is the rabble serving in your halls,

It is the rabble whence your soldiers spawn,
It is the strong arm that sets you in power
To bid defiance to an enemy world,
And it will bid defiance to its masters
If it be driven madly to despair.

The philosophic Beggar of the play comes in as critical chorus to the action, and sets his question-mark against the enthusiasm of the idealist :

Do all men keep their word, are all men brave and true ?
No. Then why working men ? Because they work ? Look
at them as they are, and not as you would have them be.
These are your new gods, called "holy workmen." True
gods, pure gods, wise gods, perfect gods—English weavers
of 1815. Aye, so you dream.

In these historical symbols, and in the intermingling of prose with verse to meet emotional necessity, we recognise dramatic forms handed down by long tradition and abandoned by modern playwrights only under the stress of emotional barrenness. Also in the closing scenes of the play, with their swift movement to the climax of the idealist's martyrdom by his fellow-workmen, we are aware of a tragic sense that may be called classical. In the ecstatic figure of the Engineer who seeks to plead with the destroying mob, in the partly mistaken figure of the Old Reaper who seeks God, in the engine, and in the mass-effect of weavers and their womenfolk chanting their demands in unison, the other aspect of Toller's drama appears. The spirit of man wrestles with mechanical civilisation, with war and the engines

of war, with material darkness and the powers of ignorance.

Der Deutsche Hinkemann, Toller's fourth play, is the tragedy of a man unmanned by a wound received in war. Hinkemann seeks to understand the significance of this mutilation, at once so trivial and so tremendous, and to face all its reaction upon his own life. He is himself the incarnation of gentleness. He meets with the brutality of bodily health in the family immediately around him, the brutality of the struggle for existence in the world at large, the brutality of party politics among those he would make his friends. He stands bloody and unbowed under the blows that shatter him, physically a cripple and a laughing-stock, but spiritually a giant among dwarfs, a man among eunuchs. It is a theme for the great dramatist. The well of pity is full to overflowing.

Fritz von Unruh

In the beginning of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* are certain dramatic questions, to which an answer in dramatic shape was bound sooner or later to be furnished by his own age and ours. "Is pessimism necessarily the sign of decline, of decay, of failure, of exhausted and weakened instincts? Is there not a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predilection for what is hard, awful, evil, problematical, owing to well-being, to exuberant health, to fullness of existence? Is there a fortitude

with the keenest of glances, which yearns for the terrible as for the enemy, the worthy enemy, with whom it may try its strength, and from whom it is willing to learn what fear is ? What means *tragic* myth to the Greeks of the best, strongest, bravest era ? And the prodigious phenomena of the Dionysian ? And that which was born thereof, tragedy ? And again, that of which tragedy died, the Socratism of morality, the dialectics, contentedness and cheerfulness of the theoretical man—indeed, might not this very Socratism be a sign of decline, of weariness, of disease, of anarchically disintegrating instincts ? ” Nietzsche believed in the impending rebirth of Hellenic antiquity. “ How suddenly the wilderness of our exhausted culture changes when the Dionysian magic touches it ! A hurricane seizes everything decrepit, decaying, collapsed and stunted ; wraps it whirling into a red cloud of dust, and carries it like a vulture into the air. Confused thereby, our glances seek for what has vanished ; for what they see is something risen to the golden light as from a depression full and green, luxuriantly alive, ardent and infinite. Tragedy sits in the midst of this exuberance of life, sorrow and joy, in sublime ecstasy ; she listens to a distant doleful song ; it tells of the Mothers of Being, whose names are Whim, Will and Woe. Yes, my friends, believe with me in Dionysian life and in the rebirth of tragedy. The time of the Socratic man is past.”

It was amid the thunders of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 that the author of *Zarathustra* set down these thoughts. They have reverberated through the literature and art of two generations, and only by an understanding of them can the spirit of the youngest middle-European drama be comprehended. The Socratic men, the contented dialecticians and apostles of morality—these surely have their counterpart among the realists of the stage, the preachers, the rationalists and the intellectual comedians. To rebel against them is not to be “a disciple of Nietzsche,” but to revert to the deepest springs that underlie drama, to re-examine elemental conceptions, to remould forms and figures of antique stature. It is small wonder that the words “Dionysian” and “ecstatic” should leap to the lips as rallying-cries for this movement. It is small wonder also that the Socratic school of criticism should consider the utterance of these new voices hysterical and overwrought. The writers of to-day were involved, like Nietzsche, in a European struggle, and they also formed their notes of interrogation beneath the walls of Metz. Of Toller some account is given elsewhere. Reinhard Sorge, author of the lyrical drama *Der Bettler*, fell at Verdun in 1916 with the riddle of his “everlasting symbols” still unsolved; but through his modern play strides a chorus of immortals projected by the minds of the dramatic personæ and accompanying the action as interpreters. Fritz von Unruh

marched through Belgium into France as a cavalry officer in 1914, and in his dramatic poem *Vor der Entscheidung* men and shadows are likewise intermingled. In a burgomaster's house a young woman lies in childbirth, with the village priest at her bedside, at the moment of the invaders' coming :

YOUNG WOMAN : That is no storm ! The foreign horsemen thunder !

PRIEST : Your babe will come, and mothers can bear more.

YOUNG WOMAN : Ah, my dear friend, I would this day were over !

PRIEST : See the grey mantle fluttering at the door !

(UHLAN enters.)

UHLAN : This woman is—

PRIEST : The burgomaster's wife.

UHLAN : Can she not see ?

PRIEST : In childbed now she lies.

UHLAN : To your protection I will leave her life.

Farewell. This dawn will reddens many eyes.

PRIEST : Do you command the village ?

UHLAN : That may be.

PRIEST : Destroying angels have been sent to oppress Our fairest earth, and make a wilderness.

UHLAN : And in the streets lie corpses, two and three.

YOUNG WOMAN : Husband and father ? No, my brother, no !

The child within the womb ? Ah, who can say ?

Who, stranger, answer, who is now to go ?

(*Her father enters, bound and guarded by Uhlans.*)

My father ! Help ! And whither led away ?

FATHER : Drive off this screeching baggage ! We are men !

YOUNG WOMAN : Ah, father, father, let me hold your knees,
And lay my head upon them once again !
Who teaches men such cruel ways as these ?

(She falls.)

FATHER : Ask that of Heaven ; 'twas not we who gave.
Now lift your tender breasts, and hold them high,
And let them suckle Vengeance on my grave !

(To his captors.)

To work, before your butcher's blade is dry !

(He is led away. The UHLAN and PRIEST lift the YOUNG WOMAN on to her bed.)

UHLAN : Your body bends in shyness toward the hour
In which the youngest bud of love shall bloom,
And like a portent of misshapen power
Disaster rushes from the camp of doom !

PRIEST : Her brother and her husband both are taken.
The grey that drew the golden harvest home
Is harnessed for the journey to the tomb.
Next goes her father. Pray she do not waken !

(He prays.)

UHLAN : O fearful Hatred every day thy claw
Strikes deeper into hearts of hapless men !
Our sunlit grazing flocks, fenced in by law,
Falsehood drives headlong to the blackest den !

Does duty call to see—
And yet to fight ?
Is duty ours to flee
Out of a murderous night ?

Where is the Deed,
And what is yet to come ?
Who shall give rede
When lips of God are dumb ?

“Wer weiss sich Rat, wenn Gottes Lippen schweigen?” This is the tragic question that lies at the heart of Fritz von Unruh’s drama. The Dionysian spirit infuses these scenes of war. Compare them with the scenes of *The Burgomaster of Stilemonde* as they present themselves to the mind of the Socratic M. Maeterlinck, and we have the two opposite poles of dramatic expression. The older dramatist outlines, wisely and humanely, a theme that his personages shall illustrate ; the younger thrusts his way resolutely to the tragic meaning behind the mask of events, and his characters are thrown up rather than created by the frenzy of the gesture. The roots of his imagination strike downward into the thought of chaos underlying cosmos, and of chaotic man in the exuberance of his strength shattering the very structure of order and harmony that his mind has created.

Kindred conceptions animate the tragedy of *Ein Geschlecht* (A Tribe), which belongs to no historical place or time and yet seems to echo the distant drum-fire of the years when it was written. The thunder of an overmastering destiny rolls about the hill-top where the drama is played ; the nameless figures tower in isolation from each other and the world. Of outward action there is scarcely a semblance. A mother, three sons and a daughter make up the “tribe.” One son has already fallen in battle. Of the others the youngest goes into the fight and returns safely. The eldest, a hero in the field, garlanded with honours by his country,

becomes a lecher and a criminal at home. The vitality of his instincts overflows. State and society, as he knows, are preserved by brute strength and boldness ; but he is "stifled by law" on his return to these calm solitudes, and finds nowhere space for the passions that possess him, body and mind. Insatiate, he breaks every bond with which family or community would shackle him. Outlawed, he breaks the bonds of his own life, hurling himself backward from "this earth-ball" with the last effort of taut muscles and a stout heart. The third son, a coward in battle, is disgraced and condemned for his military crime. The daughter and the youngest son together live on with their mother, who is the Apollonian spirit of the tragedy. She stands above these children possessed by lusts and fears ; and she is nevertheless illumined by the flame of her passion for them :

Here, there and here, dip all your iron barbs
Into my blood, and I will melt them so
That not a shaft shall pierce my children's heart !

The drama of Fritz von Unruh is no echo of a forgotten culture, but a living voice. The conception of Fate is no phantom borrowed from a dead mythology, but an everlasting symbol rediscovered. These creatures of instinct and passion who seek for elbow-room in "the prison of the mind" have more to say to us than many professors of the faculty of reason ; and the mind itself is enriched and exalted by the contemplation of the struggle.

LIST OF TRANSLATED PLAYS

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THE following notes on translated plays do not pretend to be exhaustive. In the cases of such authors as Ibsen, Chekhov, Hauptmann and Strindberg the early translations have been superseded by standard editions, and no purpose is served by offering a bibliography of versions that are long since out of print. It should be remarked also that the list of translations published in America may be incomplete.

ANDREEV. *Plays* (The Black Maskers, The Life of Man, The Sabine Women), London, 1915; *The Sorrows of Belgium*, New York, 1915; *The Life of Man* (another version), London, 1915; *The Dear Departing*, London, 1916; *To the Stars*, London, 1921; *He Who Gets Slapped*, New York and London, 1922.

D'ANNUNZIO. *The Dead City*, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Gioconda* (Arthur Symons), London, 1900-1902; *The Honeysuckle*, London, 1915; *La Nave*, New York, 1919.

BENAVENTE. *Plays* (three volumes; John Garratt Underhill), New York and London, 1912-1923.

BRIEUX. *Plays* (three volumes), London, 1911-1916. The first volume has the preface by Bernard Shaw. A number of the plays have appeared in separate editions.

CAPEK. *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots), London and New York, 1923; *And So Ad Infinitum* (The Insect Play), London, 1923. Translations by Paul Selver, modified for the stage by Nigel Playfair,

CHEKHOV. *Plays* (Constance Garnett), London, 1923.
Numerous other versions have been published in England and America.

CLAUDEL. *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, London, 1916;
The City, *The Hostage*, *Tête d'Or*, New Haven and London, 1917-1920.

GORKY. *The Lower Depths*, London and New York, 1910.
Another version of the same (Moscow Art Theatre series), 1923.

HAUPTMANN. *Plays* (Authorized edition; seven volumes), London, 1913-1914.

IBSEN. *Plays* (Copyright edition; William Archer), in twelve volumes, London, 1906-1912.

KAISER. *From Morn to Midnight* (Ashley Dukes), London, 1920, and New York, 1922.

MAETERLINCK. *Plays* (in separate volumes; Alfred Sutro, Alexander Texeira de Mattos), London, 1903-1919.

PIRANDELLO. *Plays* (including *Six Characters in Search of an Author*), translated by Edward Storer, 1923.

SCHNITZLER. *Anatol* (Granville-Barker), London, 1911;
The Green Cockatoo and Other Plays, London, 1913;
Playing with Love (*Liebelei*), London, 1914; *Gallant Cassian*, London, 1914.

STRINDBERG. *Plays* (Authorized edition), London, 1912.
Numerous versions of the separate plays have appeared in England and America.

SUDERMANN. *The Joy of Living* (Edith Wharton), London and New York, 1903; *Magda* (in several editions), 1896-1905; *Roses* (one-act plays), London and New York, 1912.

TOLLER. *The Machine-Wreckers* (Ashley Dukes), London, 1923; *Masses and Men* (Vera Mendel), London, 1923.

WEDEKIND. *Plays* (Collected edition), London, 1923. Also *The Awakening of Spring*, Philadelphia, 1909.

WIERS-JENSSEN. *Anne Pedersdotter*, or *The Witch* (John Masefield), Boston, 1917.

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